

BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG PCZONE.CO.UK

PCZONE

ISSUE 217 MARCH 2010

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PCZONE

Contents

In this issue of the
UK's best PC mag...

NEW STARTS

HAPPY NEW YEAR and welcome to the first PC ZONE of 2010! Already we've got February in our sights and we're sitting around thinking about when the first bank holiday of the year is so we can have some more time off.

Not only do we have the results of the Reader Awards in this issue – where you've decided what the best games of 2009 were and what'll be the hottest game of 2010 – but we also have *Brink* on the cover, the new *Splash Damage* game that promises to be one of the most eagerly awaited games of the year. Steve visited the development team in Bromley for a hands-on with the game and had time to chat to their CEO and creative director – talk about getting top-level access. While this game was originally slated for a Spring release, you'll have to wait until the tail end of this year to get your hands on this game, so getting the inside track this early on is a scoop we didn't want to miss. You can read all about it over eight epic pages from 66 onwards.

On a side note, all that leaves is for me to say goodbye as I'm off to pastures new, leaving you in the capable hands of Steve Hogarty. I've enjoyed being editor of *PC ZONE* and I've certainly learned a lot working here, but it's time for a change of career for me after nearly 11 years in journalism.

Gosh, now I feel very old (as does my liver!). Let's hope they have a chairlift in my new office!

Ali Wood

Ali Wood
Editor

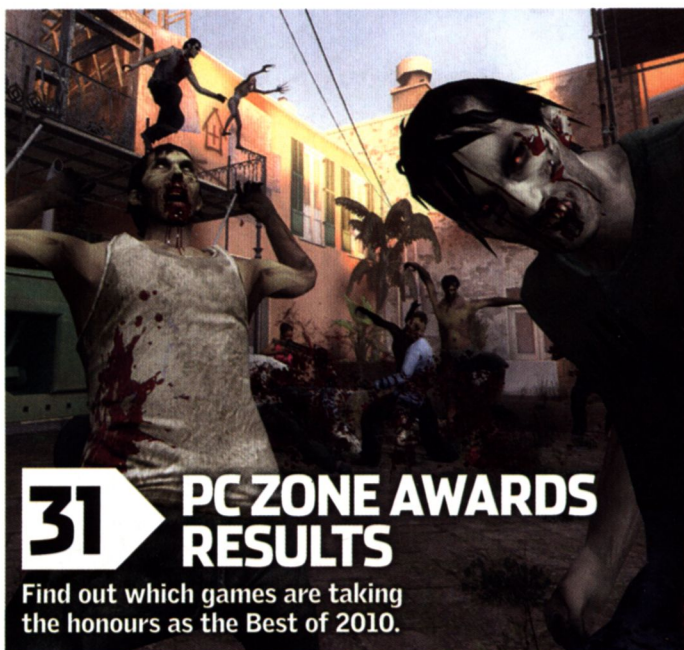
ali.wood@futurenet.com

66

COVER STORY

BRINK

Splash Damage make great multiplayer shooters with other firms' games. Can their first original project be as good? Hell, yes!



31 PC ZONE AWARDS RESULTS

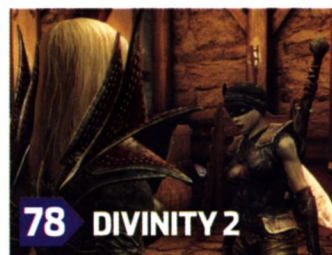
Find out which games are taking the honours as the Best of 2010.



54 R.U.S.E.



58 ASSASSIN'S CREED 2



78 DIVINITY 2

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See page 64





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FIGHT CLUB LIVE!

SEE WHAT YOU MISSED! THERE WAS EVEN CAKE!

46

KANE & LYNCH 2: DOG DAYS

The balding psychos are back. Will they actually be in a decent game this time?



112

FREWARE

Battle zombies (again), beat up cowboys, help a brain get from A to B, then pick up loads of stars. All for now!

WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



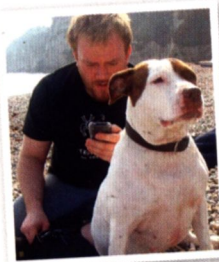
66 BRINK

Too busy? PC ZONE in 78 words...

This issue was put together in record time, thanks to it having been at the printers on Christmas Eve. Inside you'll find out what were the games you loved the most; what happened when PC ZONE readers got together; what's new in everyone's favourite civil war-ravaged underwater city; go on the rampage in Shanghai; go very co-op in a city on the sea; and find out what we think the future holds. Or at least what 2010 does.

Meet The Team

"They're the ones responsible officer! They did it!"



JON 'LOG' BLYTH

Time-travelling freelancer

AGE 17

LIKES Trends and fashion

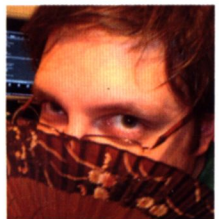
DISLIKES Cardigans and gramophones

FANCIES *Phantasm: The Movie*

FAVOURITE GAME *Granny in Paradise*

NOW PLAYING *Eufhoria*

This month, Log locked himself in a laboratory with some blueprints, a monocle and a vat of industrial strength coffee. Emerging two weeks later, he had shed his skin, thankfully grown a fresh covering over his bones and muscles, and emerged the youthful and sprightly individual you see above. Amazingly, he was still clutching his GMA award and making rude jokes about bums, willies, and noises emitted from said apertures and attachments. Some things never change.



DAVID BROWN

Staff writer

To ensure that 2010 will mean playing fewer terrible games 2009 David is crossing every part of his body that can be twisted, including his lower intestines and aorta.

NOW PLAYING: *Altitude*



WILL PORTER

Freelancer

Will returned to his father's farm, to rejoice in early mornings and a dog with an odd gait. To celebrate, he hurled himself into a vat of dung, with hilarious consequences.

NOW PLAYING: *Left 4 Dead 2*



ALI WOOD

Editor

Ali's time on *PC ZONE* has sadly come to an end. She leaves us a quivering mess (just as she found us), but we hope she'll be good to us in her new role as a PR guru.

NOW PLAYING: *Rogue Warrior*



STEVE HOGARTY

Deputy editor

His ascent has been quite quick for a young lad, but another chapter is being written. Steve's ascending into the editor's seat and we've got to be nice to him from now on.

NOW PLAYING: *Mega-lo-mania*

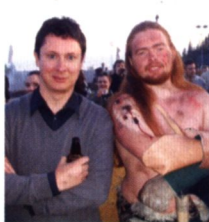


KEITH PULLIN

Freelancer

Keith told his bank to disallow any microtransaction, just in case he was tempted to buy clothes and weapons in *Battlefield Heroes*.

NOW PLAYING: *Battlefield Heroes*



STEVE HILL

Freelancer

We're not sure if snooker obsessed Steve have preferred John Higgins to win the UK open instead of Ding Junhui because he only talks to us if we're giving him money.

NOW PLAYING: *Fallen Earth*

WHAT'S HELPED THIS MONTH... The knowledge that our words are read, loved and pored over.

WHAT HASN'T HELPED THIS MONTH... Holiday deadlines getting in the way of us producing said words.

WHAT WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

KILLING IN THE NAME 57hrs Mixed feelings about giving Sony money for RATM's worst song.

LIVERPOOL FC RIP 3hrs David has been tearing his face off with frustration about his team.

LACK OF GAMES 20hrs We hope 2010 brings more games at the end of it than 2009.

ALI LEAVING 7hrs We wish her good luck in the world outside of Zone Towers.

FIGHT CLUB LIVE! 5min Less talk, more fighting was the resounding silent refrain.

SHERLOCK HOLMES 1hr The film is reprehensible, says David, even though he hasn't seen it.

ADAM GLICK 30min Last seen entering a fried chicken outlet near Holborn Tube station.

FREE MOTHERBOARDS 2min We're so generous, we gave a free motherboard to an unnamed freelancer.

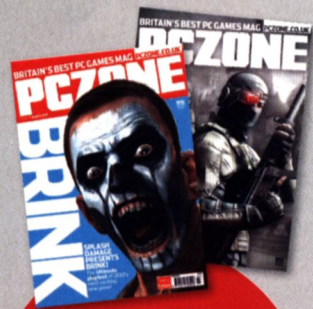
SNOW BLIND 45min Snow's just rubbish when it doesn't settle in massive amounts.

PRESENTS 23min What did we get for Christmas? Oh, nothing exciting. Boo.

WIN!

HOW TO ENTER Text TINY followed by your answer, name and email address to 87474; or send your answer, name, post address and phone number to Tiny Compo, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London, NW1 6NW, or by email to letters@pczone.co.uk (set TINY COMPO as the subject). The winner will be picked at random from all correct entries and will receive a copy of *Ghostbusters: The Video Game*. The winner will be notified within 28 days of the closing date. Texts will be charged at 50p plus your normal network tariff. By entering this competition, you consent to us using your personal details to send you information about products and services which may be of interest to you. If you do not want to receive this, include the word "STOP" at the end of your text or postal entry.

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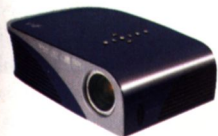
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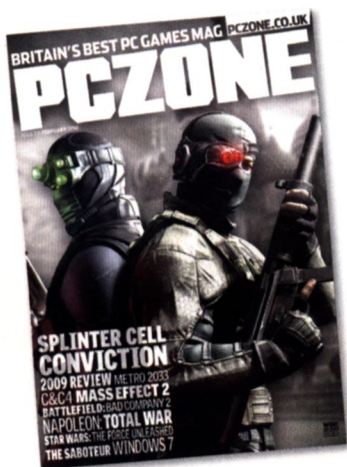
LG LED Projector
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 **LG**
Life's Good



Letters

Inundated with Xmas cards, **Ali Wood** barely had time to deal with the mail



KING OF LETTERS

WE'RE STILL HERE

Given the article being discussed on the Dear Wendy forums, regarding the British Computer Society's feature on whether people are still interested in PC gaming (snipurl.com/bsc_article), I felt compelled to write and express why I feel PC gaming has not been forgotten, but the battle lines on the console PC wars have softened slightly.

The article discusses *Vista* being the main reason for the fall of PC gaming, and DirectX 10 not being the showstopper it was supposed to be. It was unpopular, mainly, as it wasn't compatible with *XP*, so many felt they were having *Vista* thrust on them, making many turn to Xbox 360s and PlayStation 3s to get their gaming fix.

This was the start of PC gaming's death: nowhere to buy games; new graphics cards cost more than new consoles; and many were scared to open up their PCs to make them faster.

Then came *Modern Warfare 2*. I'm a single-player fan – I like story-based

campaigns – but many of my friends have Xboxes, so I felt left out. But behold, I found I could still experience their play through chat rooms, or join servers with mixed groups – Xbox and PC gamers all in one AK-47 littered arena, we laughed, died and respawned as one community... a gaming community.

So I felt better about PC gaming as a whole. We can now get games instantly over *Steam* or EA download. We can play with other non PC gamers (and aim better!). We can browse the net and use Facebook whilst reloading and hiding!

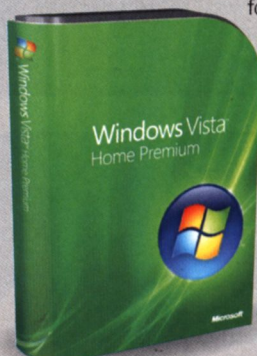
Now the release of *Windows 7* has calmed many angry PC gamers who

felt *Vista* was an abomination, but perhaps *Windows 7* will be different, and will allow them to play their older games without their PC melting.

PC gaming hasn't died, it regrouped

for a new assault. With

DirectX 11 promising greater compatibility, and less hardware demands, PC gaming may become more accessible and offer higher quality than ever before, and this will make people will care about PC gaming once again. So why do I still find myself still playing



Windows Vista. It sucked.

TIE Fighter? Richard Rose

This is a great letter that filled me with joy, so I didn't want to shorten it too much so I could waffle on, so I won't. Lovely.

WIN!



This month the monarch of the Letters pages will receive two prizes: an ATI Radeon HD 5750 graphics card, and a copy of *Colin McRae: DiRT 2*, thanks to our pals at AMD. The HD 5750 is part of a new breed of powerful GPUs that are compatible with DirectX 11. And *DiRT 2* is the perfect game to see what DX11 is really capable of.

HOME TIME?

Can you ask Relic when they're going to do *Homeworld 3*? I've played through the original, its expansion and the sequel and it needs a third instalment.

John Murphy

I emailed Relic and they totally ignored me. They've probably forgotten *Homeworld* even exists.

DROP THE DVD (AGAIN)

I'm writing to say that I fully agree with a letter sent to you from Jon Hawkins in issue 211 – please can you just drop the DVD and charge less for *PC ZONE*!

I've been buying the mag since issue 56 and I don't want to stop, but it's so expensive. Last year I subscribed to a magazine from the USA, *Maximum PC*. A subscription for a year's worth of magazines, plus overseas delivery, was about \$30 (£19)! That would only get me three issues of *PC ZONE*!

I know it's a different kind of magazine that is mostly hardware-related but my point is if they can provide such a cheap magazine, still full of content, why can't you?

Stuart Ashton

PS: I still have pretty much every issue of *PC ZONE* since 56, I feel it would be a waste to throw them all away. Have you got any ideas what I can do with them?

In America they sell children (mainly girls) to Rapture's Child Catcher to fund their magazines. Do you really want us to do that? Thought not. So for now you're just going to have to be happy with your lot.

Regarding your back issues, I was given a paper brick maker for Christmas for our fire, so send them to me and I will turn them into fuel. Only joking! Readers, can you help Stuart out with ideas of what to do with his back issues? And why haven't you been buying it since issue one, eh? Eh?

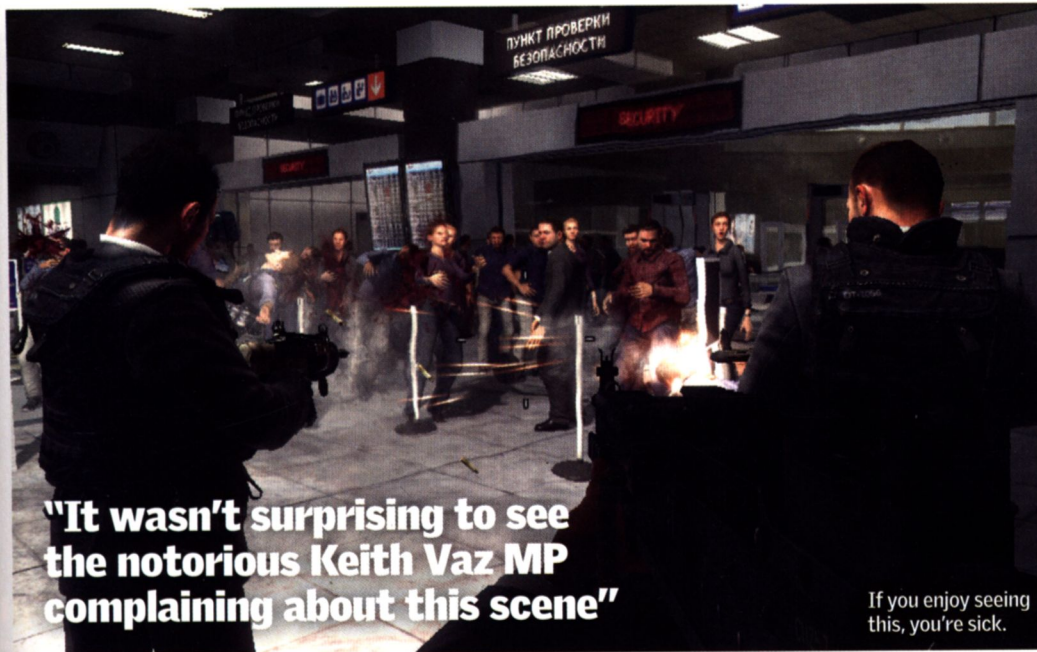
NO RUSSIAN (AGAIN)

Interesting how Steve Hill reacted to that level in *Modern Warfare 2*, where



Have Relic turned their backs on *Homeworld*?

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"It wasn't surprising to see the notorious Keith Vaz MP complaining about this scene"

If you enjoy seeing this, you're sick.

terrorists kill the airline passengers. I'm sure some tabloid will now demand the game is banned because it will surely turn us all into ruthless killers.

In the fictional TV programme *Generation Kill*, we see the US Marine platoon watching a compilation video of their tour in Iraq. Gradually they all leave (even the marine who took the footage) as the video shows more violence and dead bodies. All except one guy who doesn't understand their reaction, because he gets a kick out of it all. He's the sort of person who would feel nothing when playing that level.

Steve Hill, and the rest of us, reacts normally to violence no matter where we see it, and that is a good sign.
Gavin Hay

It wasn't surprising to see the notorious Keith Vaz MP complaining about this scene, promising to bring it up in parliament, but what was surprising was backing from Labour MP Tom Watson, who said politicians should be encouraging, not attacking, the videogame industry.

Addressing MPs after Vaz's rant, Watson said: "[*Modern Warfare 2*] carries a content warning, it is an 18-plus game. It would be better for members of this House to support the thousands of games designers and coders and the millions of games users, rather than collaborating with the *Daily Mail* to create moral panic over the use of videogames."

Not only that, but Watson has even set up Gamers' Voice – a pro-gaming Facebook group – you can join here: snipurl.com/gamersvoice.

E-BOOKS ARE GOOD

I've been an avid reader and subscriber for many years and just wondered if you have any plans to offer the mag as an e-book? This is something that I've just got into and don't actually own a reader yet, but I'm just investigating exactly what I'll be able to get onto my reader once I purchase it.

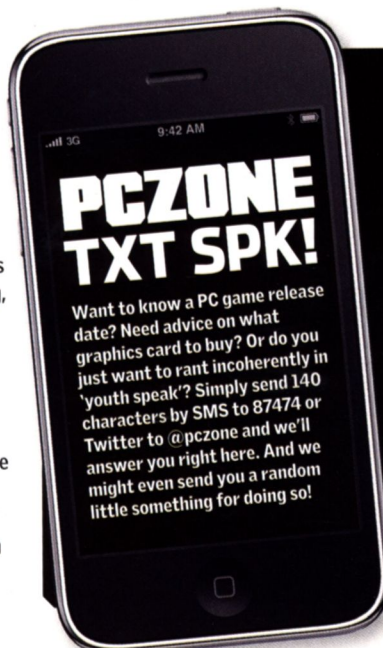
I appreciate piracy would be a concern as you don't want the mag

ending up on torrent sites, so I've no idea how or if it could work. Do you have any thoughts?

Stephan Torcy

Funnily enough Stephan, we were only talking about this as this issue was being made. We'd like to offer *PC ZONE* in a number of different formats to give readers the choice of how they'd like to receive it.

However, as *PCZ*'s owned by a big publishing company, any changes like this take time and the Board has to agree it's worth the investment. How dull is that?



Wondered where the usual Christmas edition subscribers gifts had gone.
TheBoredGamer

No idea what you're talking about.

What free stuff do subscribers get?
NOTHING! FFFFUUUU.
bsoltan

You get money off *PCZ*, isn't that enough?

A man was drowned in milk and Corn Flakes. Police suspect a cereal killer.
weirdralph

Okaaaaay.

Xmaz iz 4 lozerm
Gordy B

Funny, I felt like a real winner this Xmas.

YOUR SHOUT!
SEND US YOUR REVIEWS
WIN A FREE GAME!

BATTLEFORGE

Andrew Shiel Dods

PC ZONE SCORE 60%

BattleForge is a free to play card-based, RTS game rolled into one, which throws co-op in your face as you fight through the twilight bandits etc, with 325 cards. Sadly you only get 30 for free and have to buy *BattleForge* points where you could chance it and get a booster pack or try the auction house. Well worth it on one of the two- or four-player maps when you summon Mo, a juggernaut that likes to ram things. It becomes clear as you realise that this co-op game is more fun than some of its more costly peers.

YOUR SHOUT 83%



Send your reviews with a maximum of 120 words, your name and a score to letters@pczone.co.uk. Every one printed here wins a top PC game.

Corn Flakes + murder = bad joke.



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Never electrocute
a rhino witch doctor.

TEARS OF JOY

I don't think I've ever written in before, despite being a long-time subscriber and lover of your work, but felt compelled to let you know that your comment about *Boiling Point* having AIDS in issue 215 (*Special Report*, p16) made me laugh so much I dropped the magazine. Never was a truer word spoken in jest.

Thank you for giving me so many years of entertainment, and no doubt many more to come. Despite the lure of consoles and rentable games wearing

"Despite the lure of consoles, I'll forever remain a PC gamer at heart"

down what few standards I have, I'll forever remain a PC gamer at heart, and it will always be my chosen platform for games that are really worth getting into, as well as discovering low-level gems. Most recently being *Torchlight*, which has served my dungeon-diving desires well.

Thanks again to all at PC ZONE.
Jon Sandys

Crikey we would never make jokes about serious illnesses would we? [Consults team] Oh, it's OK we do! Glad we could be of service Jon.

ATTACK OF THE CLANS

I've been a fan and subscriber to the mag for a while, in your Letters section a couple of issues ago, you said you may run a feature on clans wishing to recruit.

I've run this past the other members in my clan and we'd like to submit this:



"We're the Cows with Guns gaming clan. You can find us at our Website cowswithguns.co.uk. We've been in existence for four to five years, and have grown from a small group to a clan of around 30 members, ranging from 16 to 42 years old.

"We've a solid core of around a dozen members playing a wide variety of games including: *Counter-Strike: Source*, *Call of Duty 4*, *Modern Warfare 2*, *World of Warcraft*, *EVE Online*, *Left 4 Dead*, *Left 4 Dead 2* and *rFactor*. At the moment we have our own *COD4* and *TeamSpeak* servers. We play mainly for fun, but have played friendlies against other clans and in some league matches.

"Our forums are very active, and have a wide range of game and non-game topics. So if you think you're interested in joining us, or just want to check us out, visit our webby and maybe drop into a game that our clan tagged players are in."

We hope you do run a clan-based article in the future as clans are the backbone of the PC online gaming world. Clans run many servers for a wide variety of games. Personally I think a one-off feature, or regular articles about PC gaming clans would be great.

Paul Jones



LOST IN THE POST

LETTERS FROM OUR
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ANSWERED TODAY

WINDOWS WOES

Could you please tell all those sad bastards who can't run *Windows 95* to sod off! They obviously don't have a clue how to use their configuration files properly. I have 625k of conventional memory with CD-ROM and mouse drivers loaded. And for all those folk who can't play *Quake* under *Windows*, why the fuck don't they just shut down into DOS mode, and save everyone reading their monotonous drivel.

Stuart Hall

Swearing in issue 43, back in October 1996?! Not sure we approve of that anymore do we? [Consults team] Oh, it's OK we fucking do! Now I just need to wait for the deluge of letters from parents of 10-year-olds who read this and then litter their conversations with fucks. Sorry. Oh and everyone knows it's all about *Windows 7* now, not *Windows 95*. Silly.



Now this is the second letter on clans, so it's looking good.

I know there are a lot of pro-gaming clans – such as Team Dignitas (team-dignitas.org), but it would be great to be able to do something on amateurs.

We'll aim to do that feature this year, so if you're in a clan who'd like to appear in this here magazine, send an email telling us about your clan to letters@pczone.co.uk. **PCZ**

PCZONE AROUND THE WORLD



We want photos of you with PC ZONE in the most exotic or inappropriate locations. Candid celeb shots count double. Every one printed wins a prize!

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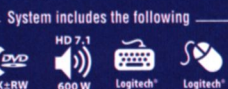


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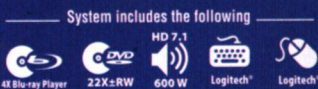
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COVER STORY

BRINK

A floating utopia edges towards civil war – which side will you decide to fight on?



THE WONKY, MALPROPORTIONED art style has really grown on us. The floating metropolis of Ark (which technically isn't a metropolis, given its population of 50,000) has intrigued us more than any other gaming locale of late. And we're ever so slightly in love with the studio behind it: an impassioned, old-school development team that's been amassing a collection of incredibly talented individuals. It's *Brink*, of course, from Splash Damage, naturally, and we've been coaxed down to Bromley with promises of some time to play the campaign-led multiplayer shooter to bits. The fun starts on page 66, a fact we've highlighted by putting the numbers in big letters to the right...

PAGE

66



**PCZONE**

UPFRONT

Everything that matters in the **world of PC gaming**

END OF A DECADE

AFTER MY RANT last month about publishers not announcing any games, there was a flurry of activity in December when four key games were revealed; *Medal of Honor*, *Batman: Arkham Asylum 2*, and *Spec Ops: The Line*.

We're sharing all the juicy information on these games (and more) in our 2010 previews, which also feature *Kane & Lynch 2*, *R.U.S.E.*, *BioShock 2*, and our cover star *Brink*. We've also got predictions from the team and our esteemed freelancers – will there be less PC exclusives this year? Will downloads increase their hold of the PC market? Will we see more episodic games? These are just some of our predictions for 2010.

And the results are finally in from the *PC ZONE* Reader Awards. They confirm it's been a good year for the core PC games, such as strategy, FPS and RPGs and there have been some genuinely delightful indie games from the likes of *World of Goo* to *Plants vs Zombies* and *Time Gentlemen, Please!*. To find out who and what the big winners are head to page 31 now.

Plus if you're feeling strapped for cash after spending all your money on Christmas presents/eating/drinking, we've got a comprehensive list of the top 10 free to play MMOs to play now, tucked away in the Freeware section on page 104.

Ali Wood

Ali Wood
Editor
ali.wood@futurenet.com

WALK THE LINE

Dubai or not Dubai, that is the question in 2K's new shooter, *Spec Ops: The Line*

DEVELOPER Yager Development **PUBLISHER** 2K Games **WEBSITE** specopstheline.com **ETA** Winter 2010

IF IT WASN'T for the world's commandos, Green Berets, SAS and other secret military units, the planet would surely burst into flames so quickly you wouldn't even have time to say "Can I smell something burning?"

This time, it's the turn of those lovable US special operations

funsters, who have to enter the "sandstorm-ravaged" emirate of Dubai.

We're not sure a city with a seven-star hotel could ever be said to be "ravaged", but as the game's set in our favourite cliché – a post-apocalyptic near-future – anything's possible.

So then, the city is swamped by sand and some members of the US Army have

become trapped there, a weak distress signal the only evidence they might be alive. Your team needs to go in there, kick some outlaw buttocks and rescue Uncle Sam's brave heroes.

The sand will play a big part in the gameplay, so say developers Yager (nothing to do with Chuck Yeager, old flight sim fans) with the constantly



STOP PRESS!

TRAITORS! TRAITORS!

Blizzard have said they'll definitely be working on a game for consoles at some point, the treacherous swine devils that they are.

LEGAL BRIEFS

Most people want fixes to problems and bugs in their patches, but perhaps what they want most of all is new legal text, as seen in the recent *Wolfenstein* patch.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Ghost Recon 4, *Ghost Recon: Predator* and *Ghost Recon: Future Soldier*: all of these have been touted as the name of the next *Ghost Recon*. But does it really matter?

31

PC ZONE AWARDS

The results are in! Find out who the winners are!



46

KANE & LYNCH 2

The balding psychos are coming back.



66

BRINK

Could this be the best co-op shooter ever?



shifting winds creating new areas to hide in or destroying the bit you were cowering behind at precisely the moment you don't want.

Those of you with long memories might be scratching your heads and wondering where you've heard the name *Spec Ops* before. It's the name of a long-running series of FPS games, of which *The Line* will be the ninth title. The series's first three games (*Spec Ops: Rangers Lead the Way*, *Ranger Team Bravo*, and *Green Berets*) appeared on the PC, but the series became a console exclusive back in 2000.

Other than the name and the fact they feature a load of soldiers, there's very little connecting the games. But *The Line* is creating its own storyline.

Further details on the *Spec Ops: The Line* game are thin on the ground, but we know that it'll be a third-person shooter and will involve leading a squad of four about. Unsurprisingly, each character will have their own specialised skills.

There's also the whole vertical cover thing going on, probably due to the plethora of skyscrapers in Dubai. According to the announcement the game will have "no good outcomes, only hard choices".

At the moment, we're at "Partially Erect" on the Excite-o-meter, so we'll have to see more to determine whether we go the whole way to "Wooden" or merely sink back to the stimulus-free world of "Flaccid". Will this be a reboot for the series, or a boot up the jackass?

"The game will have 'no good outcomes, only hard choices'"



END OF WORLDS

Stargate MMO is no more (kinda)

DEVELOPER Cheyenne Mountain Entertainment PUBLISHER Firesky
WEBSITE stargateresistance.com ETA Early 2010

AFTER A LONG time of struggle against factors old, new and bewildering, *Stargate Worlds* seems to have had its brains sucked out with a straw. The resulting mass has been reformed into a new third-person game, *Stargate Resistance*. It's still going to be played online, but it sounds a lot less impressive than the MMO did.

Teams will be the focus, with different classes helping each other out as is the norm. And the combat will be in real-time. The maps will be "wonderful" too, according to creative consultant Chris Klug. The areas will be designed to bring teams together in both hand-to-hand and ranged

combat. (Like every other multiplayer action game, then.)

Stargate Worlds isn't completely dead, it's just being worked on very slowly. Apparently, when it becomes more financially stable, things will speed up.

Fingers crossed it gets to the finish line at some point.



Looking good.

STUFF

At least we know a third game is coming. That's *Mass Effect 3*, in case you wondering. You see, it's one of those pre-planned trilogy things that's all the rage these days, what with games having numerous sequels already on the table and being developed before the first game even hits shelves. It's only a trilogy (at the moment) as BioWare have said they "don't have to worry about continuity into the next one," so don't expect *Mass Effect 4* at all. Well, do expect it, but with a subtitle like *Mass Effect: Galaxies* (or something that hasn't already been used).

LIFE IS A ROLLER COASTER

GOOD TIMES

It's a new year and we're all refreshed and ready to hit our keyboards in a typing frenzy.

It's time to guess what's going to happen in 2010 and we collate the opinions of all.

ON THE FENCE

Despite re-playing *Rogue Warrior*, desire to chow down on red meat like a cannibal gradually subsides.

BAD TIMES

New Year's resolutions are very difficult to stick to, especially when they involve not eating chips and burgers.

Someone in the street shouted at us for getting our predictions wrong. How did he know what we were thinking?

IT BEGINS AGAIN

SHIT! HOW LONG LEFT?

DEADLINE

MISSING THE POINT

"Point-and-click is dead!" cries *Pavel Barter*, "Long live point-and-click!"

SAM AND MAX have wormed their way out of a few tight spots in their time, but when faced with the top dogs in LucasArts, the private dicks didn't stand a chance. *Sam & Max: Freelance Police*, the sequel to 1993's much-loved *Sam & Max Hit the Road*, had been two years into development when LucasArts pulled the plug in 2004.

Adventure games were a dead loss, reckoned the corporate bosses, shrugging off the development team's idea of releasing the game episodically. "Digital distribution? That'll never work," they opined.

Five years after *Sam & Max*'s darkest day, Dan Connors, who worked on *Freelance Police* and is now CEO of Telltale Games, is stoic about the decision. "The management had changed at the time and that pretty much put the final nail in the coffin. We continued production for a month or so to get it revived, but it was not to be. I'm not one for looking back, so I pushed forward and we started Telltale soon after that."

At the time, though, the culling of the cartoon cops was like 9/11 for point-and-clicks. In the face of falling sales, the genre had spluttered to a halt like a dodgy Ford Cortina. Sure, the occasional brilliant title was still released (2000's *The Longest Journey* and 2002's *Syberia*) but LucasArts

were giving up on the genre that made its name in the '90s. In 2003, they had cancelled another much-anticipated sequel, *Full Throttle: Hell on Wheels*. By the time *Myst V: End of Ages* was released in 2005, point-and-click was tits up.

CROW PIE ANYONE?

Now in 2009, words are being eaten. LucasArts have partnered with *Steam* to re-release its point-and-click back catalogue, while Sam and Max have found a new home at Telltale. Telltale and LucasArts also teamed up to bring the genre's most beloved franchise back to life in *Tales of Monkey Island*, while indies are injecting graphic adventures with Steampunk enthusiasm in games like *Machinarium*.

Point-and-clicks may not sell as much as shooters or RPGs, but few genres inspire as much devotion. *Ben There, Dan That!* and *Time Gentlemen, Please!*, for example, pay homage to the 2D puzzlers of yesteryear. "Dan and Ben

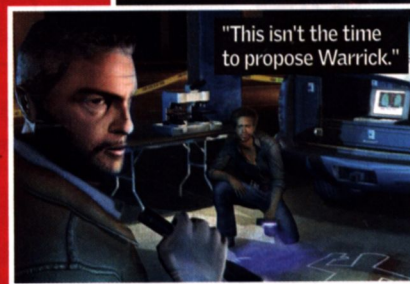
have a *Sam & Max* poster on the wall in their flat," says Dan Marshall of indie developers *Zombie Cow*. "We also take the piss out of adventure game conventions a little bit, and play with the rules. Dan and Ben are guys who have grown up on a diet of Ron Gilbert and Tim Schafer games, and lead their lives according to the rules found in the likes of *Full Throttle* or *Monkey Island*."

Certainly, few PC game genres inspire as much nostalgia. The template first appeared in 1984's *Enchanted Scepters*, a game that looked rougher than a builder's arse, before it took off with 1987's *Shadowgate*. But Sierra Entertainment kick-started the craze in the '90s with *King's Quest*, *Gabriel Knight*, *Leisure Suit Larry*. LucasArts led the pack, though, with the brilliant *Secrets of Monkey Island*.

Connors started working for the company in '93, lending his hand to titles such as *Day of the Tentacle*, *Sam & Max: Hit The Road*, and *Full Throttle*: all of which had giddy comedy in common.

"Humour is underserved in games," he says. "But point-and-clicks support it really well. There aren't huge chances for comedy outside adventure gaming. Humour, drama, mystery: all these are the realm of adventure games, because other genres focus on action."

Marshall, meanwhile, has his own theories as to the allure of point-and-



Guybrush Threepwood. Silly name, sillier outfit.



"Humour is underserved in games. But point-and-clicks support it well"

Dan Connors, CEO, Telltale Games



Sam – canine detective – and Max – psychotic rabbit-like thing.

"If action games are trying to be movies, point-and-clicks are closer to intellectual films"

clicking: if action games are trying to be movies, point-and-clicks are closer to intellectual films: "You're trying to beat the designers by working out what they want you to do," he says. "It's an unusually personal level of interaction between gamemaker and player."

PUZZLES' REBIRTH

"Even puzzles in *Half-Life 2* tend to break the sense of immersion and leave you thinking 'What do they want me to do here?' Point-and-clicks can be grounded in that relationship between them and us, which you're much more likely to get from a Woody Allen film than one of Jerry Bruckheimer's."

In spite of the genre's weird appeal, it suffered a seizure in the early 2000s. Dan Connors reckons this was due to economics: publishers were spending up to \$6million making shooters, and a further \$8m on marketing. Even if a game sold 300,000 units, it would still make a loss. Adventure games (apart

from *Myst*), simply didn't have that sales record. Jakub Dvorsky, creator of indie hit *Machinarium*, says 2D adventures hardly stood a chance when faced with the 3D revolution. Plus, point-and-clicks could be more frustrating than a barbed wire jockstrap, with their often unintuitive puzzles and linear gameplay.

Despite the bleak vista, Connors and a few ex-LucasArts developers had hope. In late 2004, they established Telltale, believing digital distribution could offer a new business model, and recognising a demand for PC game spin-offs of franchises like *Law & Order* and *CSI*. They were right. Meanwhile, the growth of the mobile game market, and the abilities of Nintendo's DS and Wii, were primed for the resurgence of point-and-click.

While this revival has seen plenty of poor games, developers have done wonders to reboot the genre. "We didn't use any lengthy text dialogues and your inventory is always almost empty," says Dvorsky of *Machinarium*. "You don't have access to too many locations at a time, and you can't click on everything on the screen – only on things that are within the reach of the main hero – so you have to search the screen with your eyes rather than mindlessly pixel hunt."

But despite their newfound attention, graphic adventures remain the ruddy-faced underdogs of PC

2D OR NOT 2D

No more combining spanners with goats to open drawbridges, the new wave of graphic adventures offer proper food for thought

SAM & MAX SAVE THE WORLD (2006, TELLTALE GAMES)

Telltale's reboot of *Sam & Max* is a cartoon film noir where there is no obstacle a wise-quip can't overcome. *Save the World* is divided into six episodes, each one slightly more insane than the last, with characters ranging from washed-up former child actors to lunatic hypnotists. The puzzles are intuitive, the voice-acting convincing, and the animation recalls a time when cartoons ruled Saturday mornings. Proving that every dog (and rabbit) has its day, *Save the World* also saved point-and-click and spawned more episodes in 2008's *Sam & Max: Season Two*.



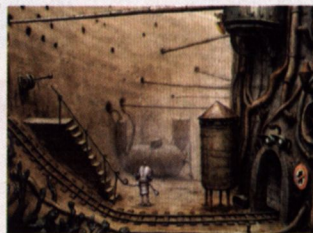
TIME GENTLEMEN, PLEASE! (2009, ZOMBIE COW)

Despite its self-referential nods to point-and-click, *Zombie Cow's* 2D adventure about two oafs passing through parallel dimensions is not exactly post-modern – the game features Nazi dinosaurs, after all – but the developers were careful to avoid point-and-click's pitfalls. "How many times have you been stuck getting a 'I can't do that!' response from an adventure game

character," says Marshall. "It's infuriating. With the *Dan and Ben* games, there tends to be a solid explanation to explain why certain stuff can't be done. It's exhaustive and exhausting, but at least you know why you can't melt the lamppost with the hot lava."

MACHINARIUM (2009, AMANITA DESIGN)

Machinarium's Steampunk graphics have an elegance all of their own. *Machinarium* has no dialogue, but that doesn't mean it's not smart. "We were influenced by science-fiction books and films – Stanislaw Lem (author of *Solaris*), Douglas Adams, Jules Verne, Stanley Kubrick, Yuri Norstein (an influential Russian animator) and Karel Zeman (one of the first Czech animators); and also by older adventure games (*Grim Fandango*, *Myst*, *Gobliins*, *The Neverhood*, *Discworld*, and *Secrets of Monkey Island*)," says designer Jakub Dvorsky.



WALLACE AND GROMIT'S GRAND ADVENTURES (2009, TELLTALE)

Some franchises are made for point-and-click. Take Wallace and Gromit, the cheese-eating duo who command massive post-turkey audiences on telly at Christmas. Although *Last of the Summer Wine's* Peter Sallis is replaced by a stand-in, Telltale's foray captures the Plasticine look of the films to molded perfection. Plus, episodic missions like *Fright of the Bumblebees* are worthy of the TV movies themselves. "The humour, art and style, is all in line with what you would expect, versus putting Wallace and Gromit in bumper cars and driving them about," says Dan Connors.

games. "There's probably been half a billion dollars poured into figuring out physics systems, AI, death mechanics, and other elements for shooters," says Connors. "There's probably been \$60 or \$70m spent on interactive stories."

"A point-and-click in a physics-heavy universe could be hilarious and brilliant,"

concludes Dan Marshall. "And it would probably bomb. Gamers just don't have the patience to sit and think things through anymore."

So will we see point-and-click adventures with high-end graphics, physics and multiplayer modes? Don't hold your breath. **PCZ**

Is there anything you want PC ZONE to investigate? (Warning: some jobs might be considered too big or too small...)

@ letters@pczone.co.uk

Special Report, PC ZONE,
2 Balcombe St, London, NW1 6NW

Incoming

All dates are correct at time of press!

JUST LOOK AT all these amazing games due out this year! Go on. Take a long, hard look at this list and see all the lovely games that are currently slated for a 2010 release. Then halve it and minus 10, add three and divide by 21, because we can guarantee that as much as we hope and wish and keep everything crossed, there'll be a huge chunk of games

that will slip into 2011. (By the way, how futuristic does 2011 sound?).

Not all is doom and gloom though, as publishers have been trying their best to secure some exciting content for their pirate-busting special edition releases of games, and you can't say fairer than that.

NAPOLEON: TOTAL WAR

Creative Assembly's *Napoleon: Total War* will be available in four versions. The *Standard Edition* includes the *Elite Regiment Special Unit Pack*. The *Imperial Edition* includes premium packaging, an A3 poster, the *Elite Regiment* and *Heroes of the Napoleonic Wars Special Unit Packs*. Then there's *Steam*, who are also offering an *Imperial Edition* including the *Heroes of the Napoleonic Wars Special Unit Pack*, and the game. Finally, if you pre-order from GAME, Amazon or Play.com you'll

receive, respectively, HMS Elephant, Grand Battery of the Convention, or The Towarczys Lancers, exclusive elite units. Phew.



JUST CAUSE 2

Rico Rodriguez is back! Square Enix London Studios have confirmed Avalanche Studios' *Just Cause 2* will release on 26 March this year.

Just Cause 2 has over 1,000km² of island paradise. The open-world environments will include snow-capped mountains, beaches, jungle and deserts. Plus, those who pre-order will get the *Black Market Chaos Pack*, a limited-edition fancy packaged version of the game containing five downloadable guns and gadgets (including the Agency

Hovercraft and Chaos Parachute), experimental and upgraded items from the Agency's R&D chaps, and a fold-out Panauan Intel Map.



AHEAD OF THE GAME

Take heed readers - this is how excited we are over the biggest games that are coming out of the next 12 months.

ANTICIPATION LEVEL

BIG BANG

NUCLEAR WAR

VOLCANO

DYNAMITE

HAND GUN

BURP

FEBRUARY
ALIENS VS
PREDATOR

9 FEB 2010
BIOSHOCK 2

FEBRUARY
NAPOLEON:
TOTAL WAR

23 FEB 2010
SPLINTER CELL
CONVICTION

MARCH 2010
ALL POINTS BULLETIN

MARCH 2010
BATTLEFIELD: BC 2

| GAME | PUBLISHER | ETA |
|-------------------------------------------|--------------|-------------|
| HISTORY ENGINEERING AN EMPIRE: EGYPT | SLITHERINE | 29 JANUARY |
| MASS EFFECT 2 | EA | 29 JANUARY |
| STAR TREK ONLINE | NAMCO BANDAI | 5 FEBRUARY |
| BIOSHOCK 2 | 2K GAMES | 9 FEBRUARY |
| DANTE'S INFERNO | EA | 12 FEBRUARY |
| THE WHISPERED WORLD | DEEP SILVER | 12 FEBRUARY |
| ALIENS VS PREDATOR | SEGA | 19 FEBRUARY |
| SHIP SIMULATOR EXTREMES | PARADOX | 19 FEBRUARY |
| SPLINTER CELL CONVICTION | UBISOFT | 26 FEBRUARY |
| ASSASSIN'S CREED II | UBISOFT | FEBRUARY |
| M.U.D. TV | KALYPSO | FEBRUARY |
| METRO 2033 | THQ | FEBRUARY |
| NAPOLEON: TOTAL WAR | SEGA | FEBRUARY |
| SUPREME COMMANDER 2 | SQUARE ENIX | FEBRUARY |
| COMMAND & CONQUER 4: TIBERIAN TWILIGHT | EA | 1 MARCH |
| BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2 | EA | 5 MARCH |
| MOUNT & BLADE: WAR BAND | PARADOX | 19 MARCH |
| JUST CAUSE 2 | SQUARE ENIX | 26 MARCH |
| ALL POINTS BULLETIN | EA | MARCH |

| | | |
|----------------------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| DAWN OF WAR II: CHAOS RISING | THQ | MARCH |
| R.U.S.E. | UBISOFT | MARCH |
| DARK STAR ONE | KALYPSO | APRIL |
| POLE POSITION 2010 | KALYPSO | APRIL |
| ALPHA PROTOCOL | SEGA | SPRING 2010 |
| BLUR | ACTIVISION | SPRING 2010 |
| DC UNIVERSE ONLINE | SOE | SPRING 2010 |
| DOGFIGHTER | KALYPSO | SPRING 2010 |
| FINAL FANTASY XIV | SQUARE ENIX | SPRING 2010 |
| I AM ALIVE | UBISOFT | SPRING 2010 |
| JUMP GATE EVOLUTION | CODIES ONLINE | SPRING 2010 |
| KANE & LYNCH 2: DOG DAYS | SQUARE ENIX | SPRING 2010 |
| MAFIA II | 2K GAMES | SPRING 2010 |
| SILENT HUNTER 5 | UBISOFT | SPRING 2010 |
| SINGULARITY | ACTIVISION | SPRING 2010 |
| SPLIT/SECOND | DISNEY | SPRING 2010 |
| STARCRRAFT II: WINGS OF LIBERTY | BLIZZARD | SPRING 2010 |
| THE FIRST TEMPLAR | KALYPSO | SPRING 2010 |
| TWO WORLDS II | SOUTHPEAK | SPRING 2010 |
| WORLD OF WARCRAFT: CATAclysm | BLIZZARD | SPRING 2010 |
| VICTORIA 2 | PARADOX | SPRING 2010 |
| THE AGENCY | SOE | 2010 |
| ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES | SEGA | 2010 |
| CITY OF HEROES: GOING ROGUE | NC SOFT | 2010 |
| CIVILIZATION 5 | 2K GAMES | 2010 |
| CRYSIS 2 | EA | 2010 |
| DEAD SPACE 2 | EA | 2010 |
| DEUS EX 3 | SQUARE ENIX | 2010 |
| DUNGEONS | KALYPSO | 2010 |
| F1 2010 | CODEMASTERS | 2010 |
| FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS | BETHESDA | 2010 |
| GUILD WARS 2 | NC SOFT | 2010 |
| HOMEFRONT | THQ | 2010 |

DEAD SPACE 2

With the original having scored 81% (PCZ 200) and succeeding in scaring the shit out of us, we were chuffed by the confirmation that a sequel to *Dead*

Space is in development. Isaac Clarke will return in Visceral Games follow up, with new tools at his disposal to slice and dismember the Necromorphs,

joining his plasma cutter. The gist of the story is that Clarke needs to stop the spread of the infection, with enough plot twists to make your head spin. "Everything that happens in *Dead Space* is relevant to what happens in *Dead Space 2*," says Visceral Game's senior production designer Ben Wanat. So now you know.



BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM 2


In the seventh Spike TV Video Game Awards in December, played host to a number of different reveals including news that Rocksteady Studios are

working on a sequel to the critically acclaimed *Batman: Arkham Asylum*. "Getting the opportunity to create *Batman: Arkham Asylum* and seeing its success has been a dream come true for the team," says Rocksteady's Sefton Hill. "We are honoured to create the next chapter in this compelling story and promise to deliver another game worthy of the Dark Knight."


There's a new website you can sign up to receive updates: arkhamhasmoved.com or you could buy *PC ZONE* instead.




| | | |
|-------------------------------------------|--------------|------|
| MEDAL OF HONOR | EA | 2010 |
| METAL GEAR SOLID: RISING | KONAMI | 2010 |
| PATRICIAN IV | KALYPSO | 2010 |
| PRISON BREAK | DEEP SILVER | 2010 |
| RAGE | EA | 2010 |
| THE SETTLERS 7: PATHS TO A KINGDOM | UBISOFT | 2010 |
| STALKER: CALL OF PRIPYAT | BITCOMPOSER | 2010 |
| STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC | EA/LUCASARTS | 2010 |
| BRINK | BETHESDA | 2010 |
| BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM 2 | WARNER | 2011 |
| DIABLO III | BLIZZARD | 2011 |



SPRING 2010
ALPHA PROTOCOL




SPRING 2010
MAFIA II




SPRING 2010
WOW: CATAclysm


AND BEYOND...




TBC 2010
CRYSIS 2




TBC 2010
DEUS EX 3



TBC 2010
STARCRRAFT II



TBC 2010
THE AGENCY



TBC 2010
THE OLD REPUBLIC

PCZONE Charts

Official data compiled by



- 1 **FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010**
Issue 214 - 88%
- 2 **THE SIMS 3**
Issue 208 - 92%
- 3 **MODERN WARFARE 2**
Issue 215 - 94%
- 4 **THE SIMS 3: WORLD ADVENTURES**
Issue 215 - 78%
- 5 **LEFT 4 DEAD 2**
Issue 215 - 94%
- 6 **DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS**
Issue 214 - 93%
- 7 **WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR II**
Issue 205 - 91%
- 8 **EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR**
Issue 206 - 78%
- 9 **BORDERLANDS**
Issue 215 - 88%
- 10 **WORLD OF WARCRAFT: WRATH OF LICH KING**
Issue 202 - 86%
- 11 **FALLOUT 3: GAME OF THE YEAR EDITION**
N/A
- 12 **CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2010**
Issue 214 - 80%
- 13 **PES 2010**
Issue 215 - 85%
- 14 **GRAND THEFT AUTO IV**
Issue 203 - 91%
- 15 **JAMES CAMERON'S AVATAR: THE GAME**
Issue 216 - 58%
- 16 **COLIN MCRAE: DIRT 2**
Issue 215 - 90%
- 17 **SPORE**
Issue 199 - 95%
- 18 **CSI: DEADLY INTENT**
N/A
- 19 **OPERATION FLASHPOINT: DRAGON RISING**
Issue 213 - 90%
- 20 **FIFA MANAGER 10**
Issue 215 - 72%

**7. WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR II**

Since its release, *DOW2* has yo-yoed in the chart, but never left.

**14. GRAND THEFT AUTO IV**

GTA4 has dropped from the chart a few times this year, but it's always come back to inflict more havoc.

**10. WOW: WRATH OF LICH KING**

Blizzard's expansion is another fixture in the monthly *PC ZONE* chart. Unlike others it never left the top 10!

**17. SPORE**

The creationist fantasy never left the charts this year, staying in the top 10 for the first half. That's staying power.



He must be malevolent: he wears a hoodie.

TRON 3.0 DUE IN THE WINTER

The prequel to the sequel confirmed

DEVELOPER Propaganda Games **PUBLISHER** Disney Interactive Studios

WEBSITE buenavistagames.go.com **ETA** Winter 2010

THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF *Tron*:

Evolution is news that was greeted with joy and terror in the halls of Zone Towers. Joy because we get to re-enter the world of *Tron*. Terror because it could mean the tarnishing of cherished childhood memories.

Tron: Evolution is the prequel to the *Tron: Legacy* movie, out in December. *Legacy* has Sam Flynn (Garrett Hedlund, *Eragon*) entering Tron's world to search for his father, Kevin Flynn (Jeff Bridges, er, *Tron*), who's been living there for 25 years. When there, they go on some kind of road trip and fight something that's really bad.

The good news about the *Legacy* is alongside Bridges, it stars Bruce Boxleitner as Tron, and there are fancy new lightcycles. The bad news is that the last major work by its director, Joseph Kosinski, was a trailer for *Halo 3*.

As for *Tron: Evolution*, we know this:

- It comes out before the film.
- *Evolution* explains what's going on in *Legacy*.
- The story features some bloke who's spreading a virus around.
- It has brand-new lightcycles.

If that isn't enough to make you pant, try this from Propaganda's Dan Tudge: "Because we're based in Vancouver, which was the site of the film's principal photography, we were able to leverage the proximity to continuously collaborate with the filmmakers and ensure authenticity between the two projects."

Translation: the people making *Evolution* actually talked to the people making *Legacy*. If this is true, *Tron: Evolution* could be a movie tie-in that's actually worth a damn.

MODDING WARFARE 2?

Tweets hint at *MW2* mod tools

DEVELOPER Infinity Ward PUBLISHER Activision
WEBSITE modernwarfare2.infinityward.com

LAST YEAR, ONE company stood out in the PC gaming world, and not for the reasons it wanted to. While Infinity Ward did release a damn good game with *Modern Warfare 2*, they also managed to anger a good number of PC gamers.

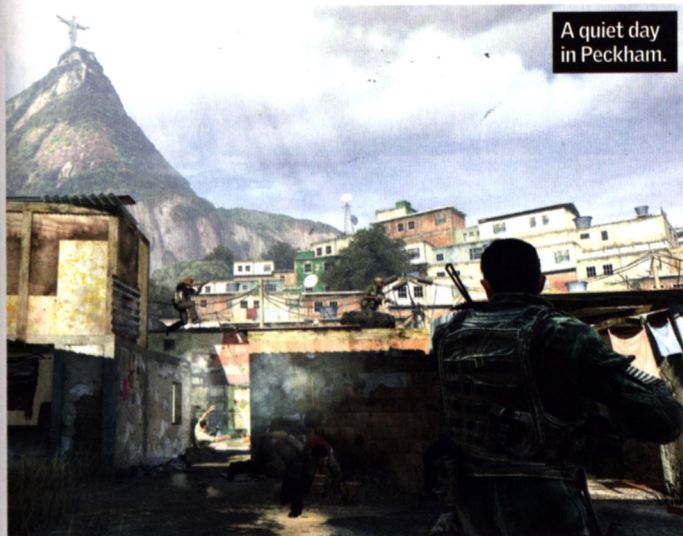
Just before *Modern Warfare 2*'s release, Infinity Ward developers and boss Vince Zampella went on the record to say that gamers wouldn't be able to configure the game themselves – a tradition in PC gaming.

Zampella's reason why IW wouldn't even allow access to *MW2*'s console was simple: "We would like you to play

the game the way we designed and balanced it."

But recently, when asked about support for servers and modding on Twitter, Infinity Ward's Robert Bowling (@fourzerotwo) said: "Nothing on Dedicated Servers, but there may be some Mod Tools news coming in the future, I'll pass it along once I have it."

Assuming the "Mod Tools news" will be that the utilities will be coming out, this is great news. That's unless someone tells Zampella that *Modern Warfare 2* players will be allowed to play the game how they like, not how Infinity Ward forces them to.



FED UP WITH THE SAME OLD SITCOMS?

HAS REALITY TV LOST ITS SPARK?



THINK YOU CAN DO A BETTER JOB...?

WWW.MUD-TV.COM

RETURN TO INSANITY

Decoding the *Arkham Asylum 2* trailer

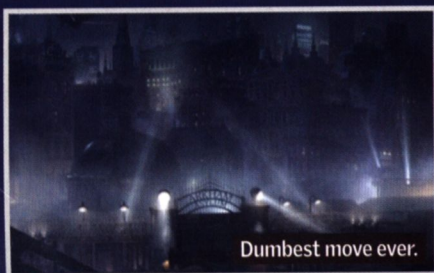
DEVELOPER Rocksteady PUBLISHER Warner Bros Games WEBSITE arkhamhasmoved.com ETA Winter 2010

IN OUR EXCLUSIVE two-part *Developer's Commentary*, Rocksteady's Paul Denning hinted there were plans to take Batman into Gotham itself during *Arkham Asylum*.

Now with *Batman: Arkham Asylum 2*'s teaser trailer released, it seems that Batman will be

battling those steroid-packed inmates from Blackgate in the streets of Gotham.

But for those who are paying attention there are plenty of clues as to what else is going to happen. So we passed the trailer onto our resident Bat-expert to see what was hidden inside it.



Dumbest move ever.

DUMBEST MOVE EVER

If the game's web address wasn't a big enough clue, the teaser shows what happened to Arkham Asylum after Joker wrecked the joint: instead of moving that bunch of psychotic supervillains as far away from Gotham as possible, it got dumped into the middle of Gotham City.

So expect a mass break out of various costumed nutters, leading to a gang war.

"Huh?" you say, "Gang war? What gang war?" We're coming to that.



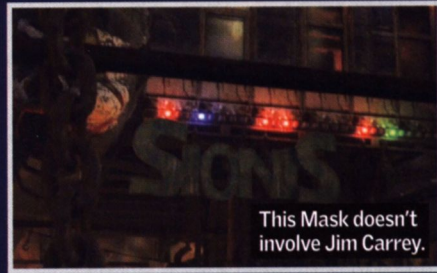
Guess who?

JOKER LIVES!

The camera pans past a bit of graffiti: "Long Live Joker", before you see the city being torn apart by goons. By itself this doesn't mean much. But then you see these...

WE NEED YOU!

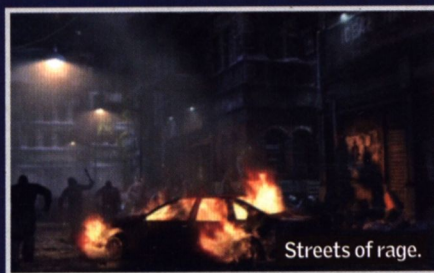
You see the Uncle Sam in those posters dotted about the place? Well he's heavily scarred down half of his body. Now, without actually saying "TWO-FACE APPEARS IN IT!", this is strong hint that Mr Dent will be appearing.



This Mask doesn't involve Jim Carrey.

NOT JIM CARREY

Just before meeting the star of the show in his fun house, there is a big sign for company called Sionis. Any good Bat-freak will tell you "Sionis" is the surname of one the Black Mask. The question now is which Black Mask will appear in the game. In the comics Sionis is like Al Capone: respectable businessman on the outside, vicious criminal on the inside. But we're expecting the cartoons' Black Mask to feature instead: a gun-for-hire with an infinite amount of faceless mercenary minions.



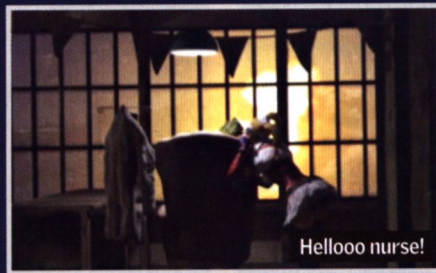
Streets of rage.

GANG WAR

Joker, Two-Face and Black Mask are no match for Batman in fisticuffs. They're gang bosses who get their minions and mercenaries to beat up on Bats. And sticking the three of them in a city being torn apart by Joker goons can only mean there's a war on Gotham's streets.

PUDDIN'S BACK!

Right at the end of the trailer we find out what we already knew: Joker's back. This time he looks thoroughly



Heloooo nurse!

trashed, but Harley Quinn seems to be nursing him back to health, as Gotham burns around him.

BAT CRISIS

The last shot of the trailer is a crumbling bat logo. This looks like it *Arkham Asylum 2*'s plot will involve either a crisis of identity for Batman (one of his standard "Am I doing the right thing beating up bad guys?" whinges), or a crisis in the public's trust in him (understandable if he failed to stop yet another mass break out from Arkham).



Not a good sign.

DO IT RIGHT

Another bad guy who we strongly suspect will be back is Bane. Those who stuck around at the end to watch *Arkham Asylum*'s final cutscene, will know Bane was still loose and healthy when Batman finally stopped Joker. And he took something belonging to Joker with him.

While *Arkham Asylum* turned Bane from a terrifyingly intelligent opponent into a lobotomised ogre, we're hoping this time around for *Rebellion* will get this South American psychopath right.



You'll never go to the circus again.

ALL FRIENDS TOGETHER!

Left 4 Dead 2 DLC has special guests

DEVELOPER Valve PUBLISHER Valve WEBSITE l4d.com ETA Early 2010

THE FIRST BATCH of DLC for *Left 4 Dead 2* has been announced. And amongst the typical vague promises, there's one thing of big interest.

In *The Passing* the L4D2 team (Coach, Rochelle, Ellis and Nick) end up in small-town Georgia. Here they'll meet Francis, Bill, Louis and Zoey from *L4D*.

"*The Passing* will become the most important campaign in the *Left 4 Dead* story, as all the Survivors are being called together in one campaign," said Valve's Doug Lombardi.

Some sources say *The Passing* will be a full campaign that fits between *L4D2*'s *Dead Centre* and *Dark Carnival*.

New stuff in this DLC will include uncommon infected, new weapons, and fresh areas for Scavenge, Survival and Versus games.

Sadly, there's no word whether the *Midnight Riders* will be putting in an appearance as playable characters, or whether including Zoey and co. will mean eight-player co-op *Left 4 Dead 2* games. We can only hope.

MY OWN FISHER

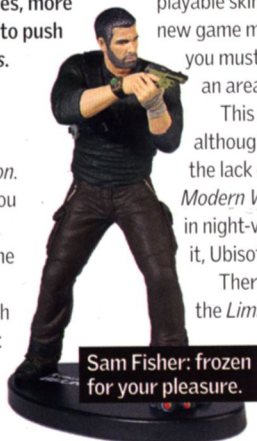
Conviction CE box set is announced

DEVELOPER Ubisoft Montreal PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE splintercell.com ETA 26 February

GIVEN THE HATRED of copy protection system and the ease of getting pirated PC games, more publishers are starting to push their *Collectors Editions*.

Now Ubisoft are following suit with the *Splinter Cell Conviction Limited Collector's Edition*. Inside this packed box you get a Sam Fisher statue, soundtrack, and the game itself in a steel case.

You'll also get a bunch of bonus, in-game items: three weapons (the SC3000 assault rifle,



Sam Fisher: frozen for your pleasure.

SMG-2 machine pistol, and the Heckler & Koch MP5 sub-machine gun); a playable skin – Shadow Armour; and a new game mode – Infiltration – where you must take down every hostile in an area, without being detected.

This sounds like a great package, although we're a bit disappointed at the lack of Fisher tri-goggles.

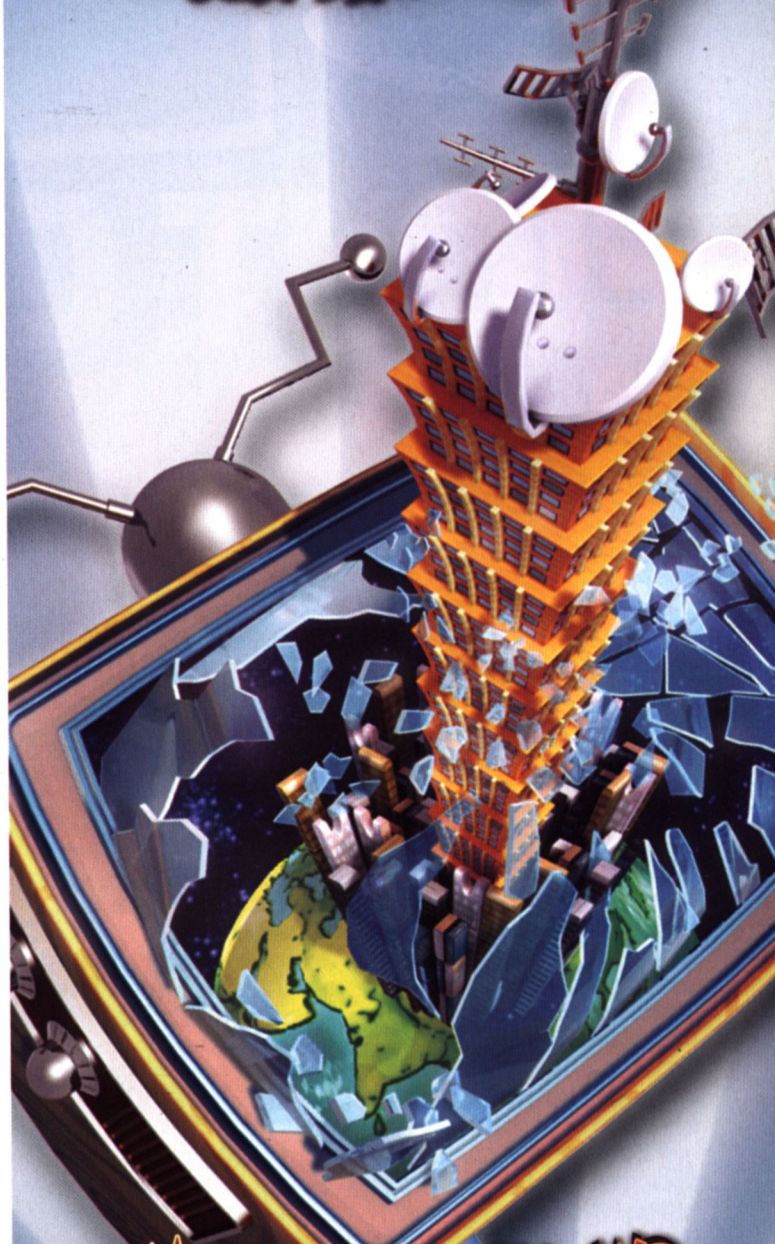
Modern Warfare 2 managed to pack in night-vision goggles, so how about it, Ubisoft?

There's no word on pricing for the *Limited Collector's Edition* yet, but the standard game will cost £39.99 – £10 less than on consoles.

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Illustrious winners: Paul Cooper, Alexander Van Wingerden-Cross, Sebastian Witalec, and Alex King.

FIGHT CLUB LIVE!

PC ZONE's explosive scrap-a-thon gets physical as we take the fight to the readers!

AND SO OUR VERY first Fight Club Live has been and gone, but for those hardy souls who braved the bitter frost of a London night, it will never be forgotten. Especially if, like us, they had to force their way through crowds of fools who packed out Leicester Square for the premiere of *St Trinian's 2*.

We'd like to take this opportunity to throw some thanks out to those who did partake in the festivities, apart from the ones who killed us during the various bouts of digital fighting we engaged in.

The location was the Gamerbase (gamerbase.com) nestled deep in the heart of HMV's branch in Picadilly Circus' Trocadero, where people can

play any number of games for a reasonable price. You can even book 20-hour stints if you're mad enough. Just bring your own toilet facilities with you, as the public ones in the Trocadero cost a mind-boggling £1 to get into.

Luckily, nobody befouled themselves, or poopsocked, during our fisticuffs, although everyone was keenly eyeing the huge cake brought in as a present from a loyal reader (see *Have Your Cake And Eat It*).

READY? FIGHT!

People soon got tired of the handshakes and backslapping, preferring to take their seats, don the attractive blue-coloured headsets and get stuck into each other using automatic weapons and grenades.

Tradition dictates that when in doubt as to what game should kick off a LAN party, you choose *Counter-Strike: Source*.

So it was that we ventured into the realms of *Dust 2*, *Piranesi*

and other famous locales. But, in a twist to regular Fight Clubbing, it was straight deathmatch (followed by team deathmatch later on).

Of course, there was a little competition attached. A Frag Lotto system was scientifically employed (collated by the Gamerbase staff, as we'd no doubt have screwed it up somehow) which enabled every player to have a chance of winning something.

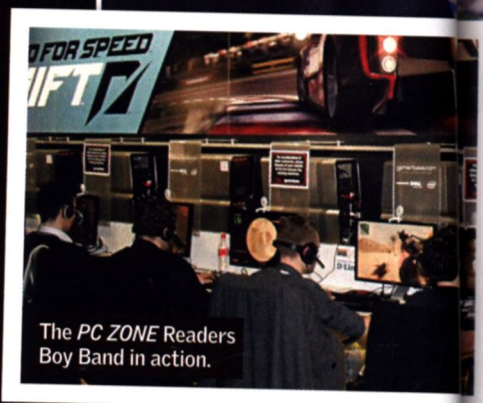
For each kill a player achieved during a designated hour-long period, they'd get a ticket. Get 100 kills and you get 100 raffle tickets, basically.

The main prize was a set of Logitech Z-5500 digital 5.1 surround sound speakers and a G35 surround sound headset, kindly provided by the chaps at Dolby. Three runners-up swiped the headset by itself. (Incidentally, you

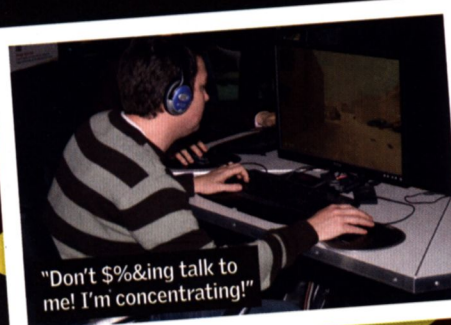
might want to try out the *Dolby Axon* desktop client if you have a surround sound headset. It can be got from axon.dolby.com.)

The lucky winner was one Mr Sebastian Witalec, so congratulations to you, sir. We hope you're enjoying annoying the neighbours with all the booming bass and thunderous machine gun sounds emanating from your glorious new set of speakers.

Runners-up awards went to Paul Cooper, Alexander Van Wingerden-



The PC ZONE Readers Boy Band in action.



"Don't \$%&ing talk to me! I'm concentrating!"

"A Frag Lotto system enabled every player to have a chance of winning something"

WHAT THEY WON!



**LOGITECH G35 SURROUND
SOUND HEADSET**
**LOGITECH Z-5500
5.1 SPEAKERS**

Clearly the devilishly handsome player on the right was winning.

HAVING OUR CAKE AND EATING IT

We do so like to be given presents, dear readers...

Here you can see our very own Steve Hogarty getting ready to chow down on the incredible cake donated to our stomachs by Alex King, a loyal reader and, in fact, officially the first person to ever attend a Fight Club Live event. It might not beat winning the World Cup for achievements, but still, it's a nice accolade to have.

As you can see from the picture below, the cake

was very expensive and contained about a trillion calories per cubic centimetre. It even had profiteroles littered on it, to top things off.

We thank you, Alex, but can you just bring us a nice salad next time? We'll need to cut down in order to burn off the calories from the cake. If anyone else wants to send us some food, preferably not past their sell-by-date, feel free. Or perhaps send us pictures of you eating strange things while playing games.



Steve only ate the strawberries, he says.

Cross and the cake-buying maniac himself, Alex King (or King Clueless if you happen to frequent the Zone or Dear Wandy forums). In fairness to everyone else who was there, Sebastian kicked all of our arses pretty heavily at CS:S, using that despicable noob-cannon the AWP. Doesn't he know the Scout is the only weapon for a real man? But we love him anyway.

END OF DAYS

As the night wound down, people split off to do their own things for a bit, with games of *Modern Warfare 2* and *Team Fortress 2* being played in various areas of the venue.

Combat was soon rejoined on The Longest Yard, one of the most famous and beloved *Quake III* maps. It might seem a straight choice to go back to an old game, but as the night's theme was deathmatch, it made sense to go for the purest deathmatch game out there.

Rockets flew and many, many rounds were played (and exchanged through rifles). Pleasingly, a number of different players managed to top the leaderboard at some point, making it an even, exciting game to finish off. Even David managed to win a round, which either says a lot for the quality of the opposition or just demonstrates how good he is at deathmatch.

But time is a harsh mistress, sweeping down on us like a giant scything blade of doom, severing our spines and leaving us defeated. Everyone said their goodbyes and fled into the night, enervated by the non-sexual mutual fun they'd just shared and, we hope, coming back for another go the next time we do a Fight Club Live (the date of which will be announced in a future issue of this here magazine very soon). We hope to see you there. **PCZ**



Om nom nom...

JON 'LOG' BLYTH...

LISTS AND**LAMENTATIONS**

2010



The end of any year is a time of introspection, reinvention, and long-term regret. Basically, if you're not embarking on an impossible regime of deprivation fuelled by self-hatred, then you're a decadent monster who doesn't deserve to live in the shadow of a judgemental god. On the other hand, it's also a time to hold your arms out and really fly into your own arse: take inventory of your achievements, and award yourself tiny meaningless icons in lieu of money or respect.

But most of all, it's a time to compile fatuous lists. So, here's my list of Christmas wishes, New Year resolutions, general gift requests, and miscellaneous festive other.

1. WISH: A BETTER BREED OF SCI-FI BULLSHIT

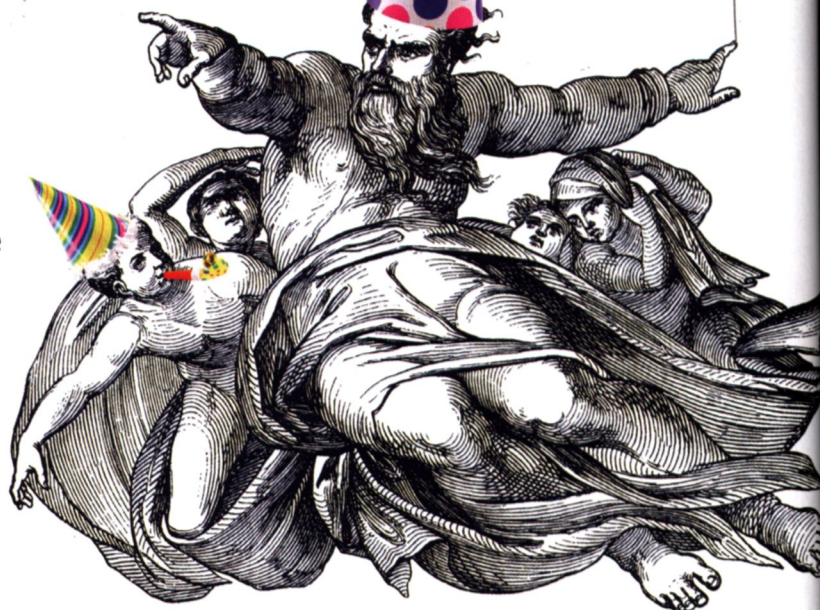
In 2008, I was sat on a chair in the centre of a well-populated room, and asked to control *Unreal Tournament 3* using a set of unconvincing pads resting against my temples. This, I was led to believe, was the future of gaming. After a series of inquisitive and unchallenging questions, it quickly became apparent that this "mind control" device did very little other than make my in-game murderer move forward when I frowned, and jump when I thought about sex with vampires.

As embarrassing as the whole experience was, I've been reading articles ever since about this ridiculous headset being an amazing "mind control" device. My wish for 2010 is: if we're going to report bizarre press releases as news – or have plastic sci-fi bullshit touted as a revolution in gaming – can we at least have something feasible, like sending robots back in time to give ourselves a big wet kiss, or mechanical dogs that whimper and tremble when you raise a fist?

2. RESOLUTION: TO NOT LEVEL UP MY PRIEST FOR CATAclysm

I went back to Azeroth recently. I told myself I was just going in to play with a reader who was lovely enough to have gotten in touch. But as the familiar clawed slump set in, it became obvious I was using that kind gentleman as a cover. The whole process of disorientation, cluelessness and tension subsided, my peripheral vision shut down and my left hand fell into the dismal PvE muscle memory of tapping 2, 4, 3, 5, 3, 3, 5. Before long I'd reinstalled *QuestHelper* and *HealBot*, and reduced the entire majestic world to an arrow I had to follow, and a bar graph I had to click on.

I knew it had to end when I realised I was considering spending £20 on enough gold to grind my enchanting up to 450. And even more serious



"Hating something that's popular is as natural an instinct as jealousy and justice"

than funding the morally grey gold farming industry, the fact I'm typing these bizarre sentences like they mean something is why I have to stop, and turn my back on *World of Warcraft*.

3. WISH: ABILITY TO REWRITE METACRITIC PAGES

It's hard, not liking a game that everyone rages about. It reflects badly on you. It sets you apart only as a half-arsed iconoclast trying desperately to think something original, and kick-start a backlash starring yourself as the hero. Hating something that's popular is as natural and unspectacular an instinct as jealousy and justice.

But seriously, *Modern Warfare 2* can suck my prize collection of fat ones. I'm not even talking about No Russian – for all its ham-fisted and successful attempts to grab headlines, that was one of the few levels that made narrative sense. I'm talking about the bloody Burger King level. I've never spent so long doing what I'm told with no real sense of... well, sense. The single-player campaign was a fatiguing, shouty micro-slog that I can't stomach going back to.

Instead of reviewing the game myself, I'll settle for the ability to edit Metacritic, and just take 15 off the aggregate score and put the phrase "fatiguing micro-slog" into every snippet. **PCZ**

MISCELLANEOUS FESTIVE OTHER: HAVE AN EXCELLENT 2010

Us and you lot, we're a shrinking breed. We are Ultima Weapons; perfect gemstones; the liquid nitrogen that makes superconductors do special science. You may be indifferent to me, but that just makes loving you easier, and more tragically romantic. I love you, you faceless, dwindling gathering of enthusiasts, and in 2010 I'm going to throw a topless pool party on top of a skyscraper in honour of you all. Until that time, I will be living in your mirrors and watching you piss.

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CHARLES CECIL

MANAGING DIRECTOR, REVOLUTION SOFTWARE

FROM BEDROOMS TO BOARDROOMS

Adam Hartley talks to a living legend, who even has an award to prove it!

THE BBC'S RECENT *Micro Men* that the Sinclair vs BBC Micro rivalry in the '80s, made legendary British games developer Charles Cecil happy. It reassured him that although he and his peers had "no idea of what was going on" it seemed that "neither did Clive Sinclair!"

Cecil puts the nostalgia for those early bedroom developer days down to the fact that "the UK had the whole of Europe as a market and we dominated development, publishing, distribution... every single aspect."

"Plus it really was just one or two people who made games back then – from the game design, through to the art, the programming, the composition and programming of the music, and so on. That is why it was very pure and why you had extraordinary products."

"There was a sense of camaraderie between those who were writing games and gamers. For a few years we were in



Charles couldn't decide which photo-booth pose to go for.

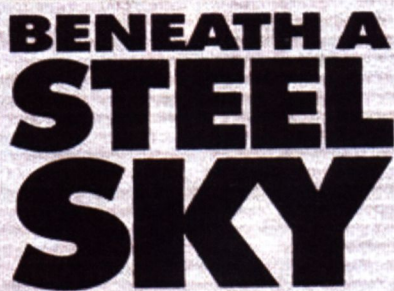
CLASSIC CECIL

Some of the games that made Cecil a legend



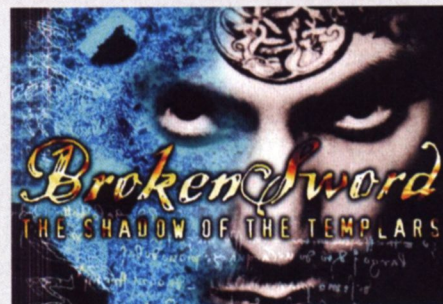
LURE OF THE TEMPTRESS (1992)

This fantasy adventure game has you, a peasant, battling against a witch and her fearsome mercenaries. Now available as freeware from Revolution (revolution.co.uk) site and Good Old Games (gog.com).



BENEATH A STEEL SKY (1994)

The adventure game that wouldn't die. Critically acclaimed on its release for its art, story and mix of cyberpunk and comedy, it's now freeware. Or you can play it on your iPhone.



BROKEN SWORD: THE SHADOW OF THE TEMPLARS (1996)

The first in the beloved point-and-click series sees lawyer George Stobbart and French reporter Nico Collard to uncover a conspiracy involving the Knights Templar.

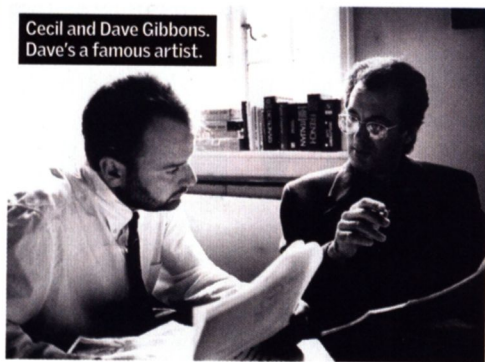


The Revolution team circa 1992. Dig them blazers.



Revolution circa 1996. Still unable to smile.

Cecil and Dave Gibbons. Dave's a famous artist.



our own little bubble, oblivious to what was happening in the US or Japan. We were in for a rude awakening."

Q What were the pre-PC wastelands of the '80s like for developers?

A British developers built a reputation for writing fast, compact and innovative code. David Horne developed the extraordinary *IK ZX Chess* programme. It was a chess programme in 1,000 bytes – far less memory than a *Windows* shortcut needs.

There were some really fun games written then – simple ports of the arcade games of the time, or original ideas like Malcolm Evans's *3D Monster Maze*, the forerunner of the FPS.

So when did the PC become a serious game machine?

For me: when *Lure of the Temptress* was released. Even then it was still basic in terms of the graphics and the audio, so it wasn't until *Beneath a Steel Sky* that PCs were taken seriously and began to compete with Amiga.

Do you think we'll see more PC classics on the iPhone?

I was thrilled by the reception for the *Beneath a Steel Sky* on iPhone. The reason that it has gone down well is that the original story, puzzles and graphics are as relevant today as they were then – and the original point-and-click interface translates really well to iPhone. The format is so tactile – ideal for an adventure game.

You're best known for the *Broken Sword* series. What is the latest on the movie adaptation?

The record of films based on games is poor – there are very few examples of where it's worked well. You risk having very one-dimensional characters and conveying the exposition in a very clunky way.

I wrote the *Broken Sword* story as a film précis and it became clear that

while the characters are, I hope, great for a game, they don't fulfil the needs of a movie. This is because in a game, the objective is to motivate the player by giving them fun things to do, and in doing this, they drive the story forward.

For a film, you have to motivate the protagonist, build up a level of empathy

with that character and the audience, and then let the audience experience the protagonist's emotions through the empathetic bond. So the relationship with the audience in the two media is very different.

What of future plans for *Broken Sword* games?

We're not working on *Broken Sword 5*, but if the film is successful – or indeed, if there's no film – then that will fix our plans. But until we know what's going on with the film then it would be futile to start working on the next game.

Where are we in the peak-and-trough cycle that's PC gaming?

People continue to buy PC games regardless of what is going on with consoles. I suspect gamers are mainly either PC or console people. Both casual and hardcore PC gamers just aren't effected by what's going on with consoles. The PC market is only affected by how publishers react, rather than the underlying demand changing in any way.

There's some interesting tech on the horizon *Project Natal*, for example.

Yes, for us, what was a revelation about re-writing our games for iPhone and DS, is that they gave an extraordinary level of tactility, which I hadn't imagined would work as well as it did. And *Natal* takes all of this one step further.

Obviously you're not touching the screen, but you are reaching in, grasping things, waving things aside. If we can realise that *Minority Report* vision of being able to move things around the screen in the same way, then we have an extraordinary new technology.

Do you think cloud gaming – like *OnLive* – will make it in 2010?

While its time will come, broadband speeds aren't fast enough to stream video over the internet in real-time with low lag. Solving this by installing huge numbers of local servers isn't realistic. So, I've no expectations for 2010, but by 2015 cloud gaming may have profoundly changed things. **PCT**

"The record of films based on games is poor – there are very few examples where it's worked"



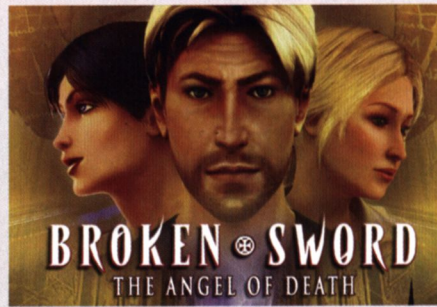
BROKEN SWORD 2: THE SMOKING MIRROR (1997)

In the second *Broken Sword* George has to rescue Nico from a Mayan cult/drug smuggling ring. This is the only game in the series that doesn't involve Templars.



BROKEN SWORD: THE SLEEPING DRAGON (2003)

Sleeping Dragon is the only fully 3D game in the series. While it was well-received on its release, it was marred with bugs and problems.



BROKEN SWORD: THE ANGEL OF DEATH (2006)

A return to the first two *Broken Sword*'s point-and-click gameplay, *The Angel of Death* is another globe-trotting adventure with George Stobbard getting tangled up with the Templars yet again.

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PCZONE

READER AWARDS

2009

The results are in! Over the next few pages you'll be able to see exactly who and what have come top in our Reader Awards 2009

SINCE OCTOBER, YOU'VE all been voting for your top games of last year to have your say in the re-launched PC ZONE Reader Awards. So a big thank you to everyone who took the time to vote.

While *Empire: Total War*, *Left 4 Dead 2* and *Modern Warfare 2* all scored an impressive 94% when we reviewed them, we know you don't always agree with us (and there's nothing wrong with that), so it was interesting to see whether they won their respective categories. But the award I was most excited about was seeing which game won the Most Wanted gong. I'm not going to spoil it for you, as you just turn

the pages to find out, but it's pleasing to know that we're on the same wavelength as you lot.

Finally, a special mention goes to all those who put the same game in every field, (*Time Gentlemen, Please!* can't win in each category), and the Tripwire Interactive community who got themselves organised and did their best to get Tripwire and *Killing Floor* an award. Nice try, but no cigar this time!

Ali Wood

Ali Wood, editor



ALIENWARE  ALL POWERFUL



BEST RPG

WINNER

DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS

BIOWARE > 93% > PC ZONE 214

Despite all the flashy trailers promising Marilyn Manson, tits, thighs and naked flesh, this game was just what we expected it to be: the most *Baldur's Gate*-esque game since *Baldur's Gate*. With enough writing in it to make Marcel Proust's collected works seem lightweight, *Dragon Age* is a true epic in scale. The game was a triumph for all those wanting a proper RPG in the modern age, one not blighted by the 'dumbing down' curse. We can't wait to see what's next.



RUNNER-UP

FALLOUT 3: GAME OF THE YEAR EDITION

BETHESDA > 90% > PC ZONE 201



RUNNER-UP

BORDERLANDS

GEARBOX > 88% > PC ZONE 215

BEST SIM

WINNER

THE SIMS 3

EA > 92% > PC ZONE 208

The Sims games are biggest selling PC games worldwide, but *The Sims 3* took us by surprise as not only is it incredible addictive, but it brings fresh life to the series. While staying true to *The Sims* formula we've come to know and love, this sequel introduces lifetime dreams and wishes for your Sims and fully explorable towns. And that was before the first expansion pack, *World Adventures*, appeared, heralding a new direction for *The Sims* add-ons by providing new directions in gameplay instead of furniture and clothes. A well-deserved award winner.



RUNNER-UP TROPICO 3

HAEMIMONT GAMES > 74% > PC ZONE 214



RUNNER-UP ARMA II

BOHEMIA > 70% > PC ZONE 209

BEST FPS**WINNER****LEFT 4 DEAD 2**

> VALVE > 94% > PC ZONE 215

So it looks like Valve didn't disappoint in the end, did they? Valve's announcement of a *Left 4 Dead* sequel caused concerns the original would be ignored. But Valve managed to win over some members of the main boycott group, simply by inviting them to their studios to test run *L4D2*. You've got to love a developer who genuinely cares what the fans think. Plus this game genuinely deserves this award, for being a worthy addition to the FPS genre and bringing with it a generous dollop of humour. It's good to see you liked *L4D2* as much as we did.

**RUNNER-UP
MODERN
WARFARE 2**

> INFINITY WARD > 94% > PC ZONE 215

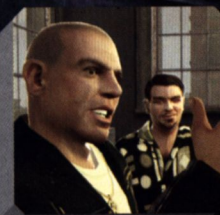
**RUNNER-UP
BORDERLANDS**

> GEARBOX > 88% > PC ZONE 215

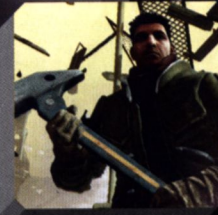
**BEST ACTION/
ADVENTURE****WINNER****BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM**

> ROCKSTEADY > 89% > PC ZONE 212

Batman: Arkham Asylum made the most of its license but never once relying too heavily on it, making it the standard by which all tie-in games should be defined. With an excellent cast backing up the action, this game never once got boring, which is a testament to the depth and all-round quality of Rocksteady's genre-topping game. The sequel has already been announced and it'll be interesting to see how well it shapes up after this triumph.

**RUNNER-UP
GRAND THEFT
AUTO IV**

> ROCKSTAR > 91% > PC ZONE 203

**RUNNER-UP
RED FACTION:
GUERRILLA**

> VIOLITION > 73% > PC ZONE 211

BEST SPORTS GAME**WINNER****FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010**

SPORTS INTERACTIVE > 88% > PC ZONE 214

For the first time, Sports Interactive faced a stiff challenge from its competitors, but it rose to the task admirably and produced yet another maddeningly addictive game for the football-consuming public to gobble up. An improved 3D engine helped matters no end, turning the rudimentary effort of 2009 into a more rounded, realistic feel. There's still no doubt that *FM2010* is the supreme football management game out there.

**RUNNER-UP
FIFA 10**

> EA > 66% > PC ZONE 214

**RUNNER-UP
PES 2010**

> KONAMI > 85% > PC ZONE 214

BEST STRATEGY**WINNER****EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR**

CREATIVE ASSEMBLY > 94% > PC ZONE 206

It might have taken a little while to reach peak performance, but it's now clear why *Empire: Total War* deserved the praise it got on its release. The first truly global entry in the *Total War* series, *Empire* gave us India and it gave us the Americas. It also successfully embraced the move from hand-to-hand melee fighting to a long range rifle-based system. And, of course, there was the challenging naval combat. With the impending release of the standalone expansion *Napoleon*, it's clear the *Total War* series is going to continue capturing the territories of our heart.

**RUNNER-UP
WARHAMMER
40,000: DAWN
OF WAR II**

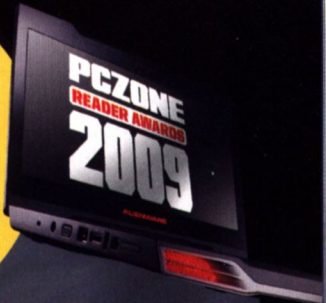
> RELIC > 78% > PC ZONE 205

**RUNNER-UP
HEARTS OF
IRON III**

> PARADOX > 60% > PC ZONE 213

WINNER!

And the winner for the Alienware M15x gaming laptop is Hany Gohary. Congratulations!



BEST MMO

WINNER

AION

➤ NCSOFT ➤ 80% ➤ PC ZONE 214

In 2009 *Aion* flew high above the pack of free-to-play MMOs to nab this trophy. While grind is a feature of the game, it also had an amazingly good character creator, and an intriguing PvPvE dynamic. But in terms of looks alone it is leagues ahead of the competition that are trying to out-*Warcraft* each other. With *Aion* NCsoft delivered a well-balanced, lovingly presented and constantly satisfying MMO.



RUNNER-UP
CHAMPIONS ONLINE

➤ CRYPTIC ➤ 64% ➤ PC ZONE 212



RUNNER-UP
EVE ONLINE

➤ CCP GAMES

BEST DRIVING OR RACING

WINNER

COLIN MCRAE: DIRT 2

➤ CODEMASTERS ➤ 90% ➤ PC ZONE 215

Coming up on the outside, *DiRT 2* sped in front of the pack in this year's incredibly closely contested racing genre competition. Three cracking racing games were in it right to the finish line, but the DirectX 11-tuned *DiRT 2* pulled it ahead of the pack. It's far from being a ruthlessly accurate simulation, but it's just so damn fun that you'd have to be a curmudgeon not to enjoy it. After all it can't just be the hardware instanced tessellated crowds or tessellated water with dynamic displacement mapping that drove it to victory.



RUNNER-UP
NFS: SHIFT

➤ SLIGHTLY MAD ➤ 84% ➤ PC ZONE 213



RUNNER-UP
BURNOUT
PARADISE:
THE ULTIMATE BOX

➤ CRITERION ➤ 89% ➤ PC ZONE 206

BEST INDIE

WINNER**BRAID**

NUMBER NONE > 90% > PC ZONE 208

Jonathan Blow's clever platformer caused a stir when it first arrived. It's dynamic was simple, yet fiendish in its intricacies. Time-bending puzzles merged with an incredibly arty plot to create a game that made you feel stupid and clever all at the same time. *Braid* is one of those games that splits communities in half, but in this case, the naysayers have been drowned out by the fans. If you haven't yet, let the soothing music and pastel pictures transport you to a fuzzy warm game-playing nirvana.


RUNNER-UP
**TIME GENTLEMEN,
 PLEASE!**

> ZOMBIE COW STUDIOS > 90% > PC ZONE 211


RUNNER-UP
MACHINARIUM

> AMANITA DESIGN > 73% > PC ZONE 215

BEST DEVELOPER

WINNER**BIOWARE**

Such was the reaction to BioWare's latest epic, *Dragon Age: Origins*, that it obliterated all comers with a chilling cone of developer cold, freezing the likes of Valve and Splash Damage in their place with its RPG goodness. That's all BioWare put out last year, but as the old saying goes, it's not the quantity but the quality that counts. Who knows what next year will bring, with *Mass Effect 2* and *Star Wars: The Old Republic* waiting in the wings to push BioWare even further into the stratosphere.


RUNNER-UP
VALVE

RUNNER-UP
SPLASH DAMAGE

2010'S BEST GAME

WINNER

DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS

BIOWARE > 93% > PC ZONE 214

Despite knowing how much people loved the game, it was a surprise to see how far ahead *Dragon Age: Origins* was when the final votes were tallied. In the end, BioWare's epic RPG convincingly won the day, proving you revelled in the blood-splattered glory that is its combat, the skin-melting splendour that is its magic, and the breast-stroking excellence that is its storyline. Finally, an honourable mention has to go to the people from Tripwire Interactive's forums who organised a voting campaign to get *Killing Floor* in this spot (or tried to rig the vote, depending on who you ask). Nice try guys, better luck next time.

**RUNNER-UP**
LEFT 4 DEAD 2

VALVE > 94% > PC ZONE 215

**RUNNER-UP**
MODERN WARFARE 2

INFINITY WARD > 94% > PC ZONE 215

MOST WANTED

WINNER**BRINK**

SPLASH DAMAGE

Before you say anything, no, it was a genuine vote and it's just a coincidence that we happen to have a big old preview of *Brink* in this very issue (see page 66). It's a big preview because it's a big game. We won't shoot our bolt here, so to speak, we'll leave that to Steve, but suffice it to say that we can see just why you're all so excited about the prospect of getting your hands on Splash Damage's upcoming game.

**RUNNER-UP**
ALIENS VS PREDATOR

REBELLION

**RUNNER-UP**
BIOSHOCK 2

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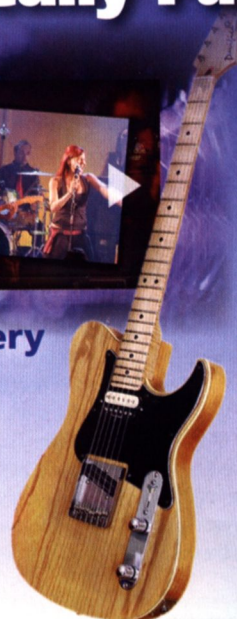
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THE PCZONE GAMES OF 2010

The guide to what'll be great in the next 12 months

LET'S BE HONEST: 2009 was an awful year on the whole. Sure, there were some blindingly great games, and even more astonishing announcements, but that sour-puss credit crunch put the kybosh on any real sense of progression. What we've been reduced to now: sleeping on the streets with nothing but unsold copies of *Dark Void* to keep us warm, while we sniff bums for pennies, is a harrowing indictment of how bad things have become. What an awful, soul-cracking decade.

But it's over! The economy is turning from an emaciated husk to a buxom, full-lipped young lady. Bankers are digging up the money they buried in forests, and the games industry, bruised and battered by the downturn, is flexing its muscle once again.

Exhibit A is this here round-up of 2010's greatest games, the ones you and your loved ones should be looking forward to and ruminating about for the entirety of this year. From the unassuming sort, in the form of the affable *R.U.S.E.* and the silent mammoth *Star Wars: The Old Republic*, to the blockbusters, the likes of *Medal of Honor* and *Kane & Lynch 2*.

And then, of course, there's our cover feature, the spectacular *Brink* from the chaps at Splash Damage. You'll find a couple of dozen other games in among the furore of forward-thinking, as well as our own predictions as to what this brave new lap around the sun might hold for our beloved platform. Will the increasingly popular digital download platforms tighten their grip on the market? Or will games start being

delivered to us by robotic canine couriers who, for an added fee, will sneeze MP3s through our letterbox? Will 3D monitors finally replace standard viewing, or will we refuse to have to wear a special pair of glasses every time we fire up a game of *Team Fortress 2*? Surely it's only four months until graphics are so realistic that we can no longer tell right from wrong?

Nobody knows, but some of us are arrogant enough to make wild guesses with conviction. We'd like to hear what you think is in store in 2010, as long as it's either vaguely intelligent or outrageously funny. Email your ideas to letters@pczone.co.uk. Now hold on to your hats: we're about to dive into a new year of hotness, and tests have shown that hats tend to fly right off when that happens.

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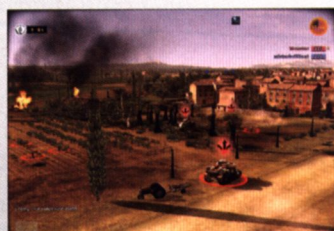
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JORDAN THOMAS
CREATIVE DIRECTOR, 2K MARIN



MELISSA MILLER
SENIOR PRODUCER, 2K MARIN



BIG SISTER'S BIG DADDIES

Prepare to discover more secrets of Rapture

DEVELOPER 2K Marin PUBLISHER 2K Games WEBSITE bioshock2game.com ETA 9 Feb

THIS IS ONE game that can only be described as being "eagerly anticipated." *BioShock's* mix of first-rate FPS action and an intelligent and literary plot, based on a conflict of philosophies, made it an instant classic. Now as *BioShock 2* prepares to rise up, two of its designers step forward to tease us about what's new.

Q Did players' feedback make a difference to this game?

A **Jordan Thomas:** People talked about having more choice over the story and more ways to customise the game. They wanted more occasions where they could plan before a big encounter. And they were interested in multiplayer. So we added all that stuff.

The changes to the gathering ADAM

encounters in the game allows the player to lay traps and strategise a bit more before all splicers come running at you. Then at the conclusion of several of the levels there are some interesting choices for what you want to do with the Little Sister, which also affect the eventual outcome of the game.

Melissa Miller: Multiplayer is a big part of *BioShock 2* and it certainly wasn't something where we thought "Oh let's just shove a multiplayer mode on". We went to a lot of trouble that it was something that would fit properly into the Rapture universe, and gameplay wise.

You've changed how the player moves through the story this time around.

JT: The audio drama in the first game, while powerful and elegant, tended to

ride too much on top of your game. We found that players were still craving more interpersonal contact and that they wanted more meaningful interactions with Rapture's citizens. And so it is in the climactic moments in this game, where you spent face-to-face moments with one of these people that they kind of make their pitch to you. And after that you have to then decide what to do.

How did you arrive at the decision to make the villain an altruist?

JT: Well I would actually argue that most villains believe themselves to be altruists! Very few people consider themselves evil, and the most extreme ideals in the whole of human cognition are typically behavioural altering ones – those systems of redistribution or restraint of power that are designed to uplift the species, typically end up stamping out people's rights. So Sophia Lamb in *BioShock 2* believes in the greater good for the greatest number, very much inspired by philosophers such as John Stuart Mill and Karl Marx.

And if you take that philosophy to its extreme, then you are kind of applying an offspring-like loyalty to the citizens of the entire world. And Lamb has undergone this mental shift – which leads her to become a very daunting figure, utterly

Rapture remains an Art Deco hell.

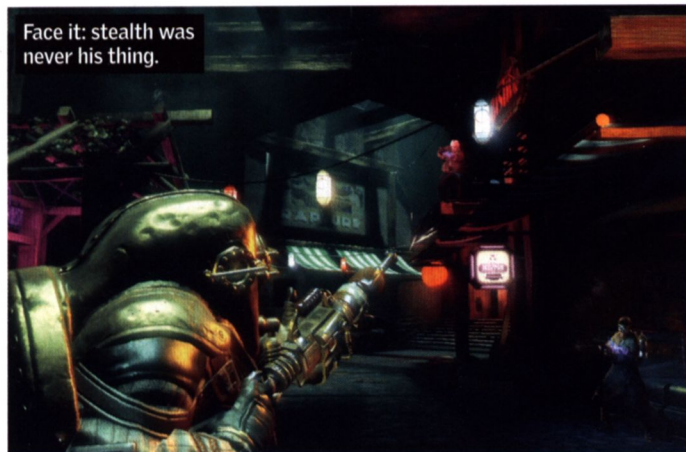


devoid of compromise and maddening beyond belief. And the player is kind of like the last individual within Rapture.

What about other new characters in the game with different world views?

JT: Sinclair – who appears prominently in both the single-player and multiplayer versions of the game – is a good example of moral relativism. He's not a nihilist, such as Fontaine, but he's continually defining the rules on the hoof as he goes. He is closer to us. Yet he has no scruples. He is affably monstrous from time to time, but he is also a useful ally to you.

MM: And while Sinclair is kind of the chief character in the multiplayer game, he doesn't actually physically show up, but his presence is very much felt because the citizens of Rapture have



"It's powerful when I learn about myself while being entertained"



enrolled in this 'Sinclair Solutions Home Consumer Rewards Club' – this pyramid-scheme he has started up in order to promise these people new cutting-edge plasmid weapon technology.

Are these philosophies for consideration by players?

JT: For me, yes, because I personally enjoy entertainment that has some element of introspection and catharsis. For me, it's powerful when I learn a little bit about myself while being entertained. So I think that *BioShock 2* successfully asks interesting questions and allows the player to be the one who arrives at the answers.

When you're talking to non-gamers do you find that they are surprised at how clever the storytelling and ideas in the game are?

JT: For sure. The original game attracted attention from publications such as *Forbes* and *Psychology Today* looking at it. As gamers are growing up they are demanding more mature themes. And these non-gamers are interested in the ideas that go into games such as *BioShock*.

MM: One of the things that makes *BioShock* unique is its layers.

On top of all these intricate and complex themes in the game, at the end of the day, you might just talk to some gamer off the street and they'll tell you they thought it was "a real cool shooter"

in which they "did a lot of cool shit". It's all there. It's just down to how deep you personally want to go.

JT: Though we are not aware of anybody working on a doctorate based on *BioShock*. Yet. **PCZ**



Playing 'Nurse' was never so disturbing.



Dr. Bridgette Tenenbaum: a bloody loon.



Blimey: he looks like Christian Bale.

IT'S GETH TO SEE YOU...

MASS EFFECT 2

Steve Hogarty gets his mass in gear...

DEVELOPER BioWare PUBLISHER EA

SHEPARD IS SO close we can smell him – he smells of onions and motor oil – as *Mass Effect 2* is out in literally a matter of days. If you're a slow reader, it might even be out right now, in which case we can say with relative safety that you should head right out and buy it. But for now, let's look at the final tidbit of hype BioWare have dropped into our beautifully contoured laps.

It's Justicars. Justicars are rogue Asari warriors, Sam Fisher-like splinter cells who operate above the jurisdiction of the Asari government. The Asari, if you can't keep up, are the blue alien ladies with oversized breasts and alluring sex-voices. Specifically we're being introduced to one Justicar called Samara, who insists that the

ETA
26 JAN
2010



Samara: far sexier than any car.

more you say the word 'Justicar' the more it sounds like a vigilante assassin, and less like an incredible crime-fighting Ford Escort.

She'll form one member of your squad, though the composition and consistency of the company you keep is itself changing for the sequel. The hard and fast alliances of the

old school BioWare have been ousted in favour of something approaching a *Dragon Age*-style friendship system. The means with which you persuade people to join your crew will affect their opinions of you, and



Nice tats.

the actions you take throughout the plot will determine whether or not they'll stick around – or, as BioWare have been hinting, whether or not Shepard even makes it to the end of the game. **PCZ**



Are those
pastry cutters?



STAR TREK ONLINE

A bold new frontier

DEVELOPER Cryptic PUBLISHER Atari ETA 5 February

THIS GAME HAS crawled into our PCs with the speed of Bones going to an Alcoholic Anonymous meeting, because Cryptic have been making a damn fine game.

Even in its beta stage this MMO proves to be an excellent mix of strategic starship combat and single-player squad-based ground missions.

While the ground-based missions resemble *WOW*-style grinding ("Go to X and kill/collect Y number of Z"), each task is part of a larger mission that sees you jumping from your spaceship, planetside, back into space, then back into planets, space stations and other players' ships.

Each mission is quickly paced, leaving you no time to get bored. But the revolution is that these involve squad-based combat. Your squad can consist of other players or NPCs that you control, equip and train up.

These bridge officers are vital to success in the game. Each have abilities that your PC (their captain) will lack, meaning you have to learn

to recruit the right officers, learn how to use them, and take care to ensure their training is up-to-date and relevant to your needs. They're not only useful on the ground, as these officers add to or enhance your spaceship's combat abilities, so they grant you tactical advantages on the ground and in space.

AMONGST THE STARS

Space is, literally, the other half of *Star Trek Online*. Often you'll find you spend half of the game battling the various enemies of the Federation (or whatever faction you sign up to). As with your crew, your starship is highly customisable – you can change its chassis, or add weapon and defence systems. As with your bridge officers, you can't ignore upgrading your spacecraft, because starship combat is dangerous – even at early levels – if slowly paced.

Thanks to wide turning circles and slow speeds, ship-to-ship combat resembles being in a ballet where

dancers wade in treacle and have ray guns. You have to develop a high level of a tactical awareness to be a success in combat. Fortunately the game eases you into building this.

The biggest problem with *Star Trek Online* is that it's *Star Trek Online*. Gamers who don't want to be tarred with the Trekkie brush could be put off playing. Yet *STO* is set far enough from the canonical *Star Trek* universe, that the only people who could find an objection are rapid anti-Trekkies. Meanwhile the rest of us who like sci-fi and enjoy MMOs will find plenty in this game to please them – even if MMOs aren't their thing. **PC+**



Can you name
that starship?

2010 PREDICTIONS



**ALI
WOOD**
Editor

Which game are you looking forward to?

Mafia II. We loved the first one here at PC ZONE, so have high hopes for the sequel. Plus, I like a game that feels a bit like Buggy Malone.

Will this year be better for PC games?

I got really frustrated with all the slippages in 2009, feeling let down when we were told we wouldn't be getting *Batman: Arkham Asylum* for several months after our console cousins. Luckily Rocksteady turned out a bloody good game. I think the first few months of the year will be buoyant and we will see a massive slump over summer. Hopefully with no *Modern Warfare 2* being in the run up to Christmas this year, publishers will be prepared to stick to their plans.

How will things change for PC gamers in this year?

We're going to see less new games. More and more developers are playing it safe and releasing sequels.

ChartTrack have said they'll include digital download sales in their charts, so we'll see recorded sales of PC games rise.



**STEVE
HOGARTY**
Deputy
Editor

Which game are you most looking forward to?

Mafia II is set to be the most heavily atmospheric title of 2010, saturated in period authenticity by virtue of having a massive wardrobe of amazing '50s clothes and hats. There's a reassuring sense that 2K Czech know exactly what they're doing too, buoyed by a distinct awareness of what made the original *Mafia* such a beautiful and engaging game. I can't wait.

Will this year be better for PC games?

Yes, if not just for the simple fact that *Modern Warfare 2* has scared nearly every other big release into 2010, but because Blizzard will be dropping *Cataclysm* and at least one episode of *StarCraft II* into our laps. Also *Windows 7* is better than *Vista*, and *Games for Windows - LIVE!* is becoming less offensive with every month.

How will things change for PC gamers in this year?

The internet fad will begin to die out and games will be encoded digitally on to polycarbonate discs and delivered to your home by a huge workforce of "post-men". The costs involved will be astronomical, and games will begin to cost up to £4999

KANE & LYNCH DOG DAYS

2

TM

伏天

David Brown accepts the blindfold and waits patiently for the information bullets to strike

DEVELOPER IO Interactive PUBLISHER Square Enix WEBSITE kaneandlynch.com

LET'S BE HONEST here: the first *Kane & Lynch* game, *Dead Men*, was rubbish. The general atmosphere was one of disbelief that such a rancid turd could be flushed out of the game pipe over at IO Interactive, developers of the beloved *Hitman* series.

Dead Men was just really boring, a real slap in the face for their fans. The storyline and its setting had so much potential, but the actual game just felt so wrong on nearly every level.

So, it was with a great deal of trepidation that I was shovelled into an expensive hotel in Aldwych, into a darkened room where Hakam Abrack, producer on *Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days*, was poised and ready to accept me, and my questions. Abrack's job was to explain to me why we should all care about *Kane & Lynch 2* and it's now my job to confirm whether it's worth keeping an eye on as well.

The plot was the good bit from the first game, the sole shining beacon of light emanating from the foul depths of its dark soul. It took a lot of its inspiration from stylised crime/action films like Michael Mann's *Heat*, so much so that it even effectively copied that bit where they rob the bank and shoot it out with the cops in the midst of a load of cars.

HIDE AND SEEK

This time out, it seems that IO are still going for a glossy action movie feel, except in microcosm rather than broad strokes. *Kane & Lynch 2* is more about capturing the feeling of intensity in small-scale set pieces. So, for example, it's all about diving behind a bit of cover (yes, it has a cover system like the first game – make of that what you will) that gets blown to bits around you, forcing you to scramble elsewhere.

"It's not a 100% damage model," Abrack pipes up. "We've spent a lot of time making things destructible to support the intense feel, but obviously it has an impact on gameplay in terms of cover being destroyed, like if you fall down behind some and it starts to break up. There's lots of a bottles and some scenes where you get shot by very heavy gunnery and everything just explodes around

you, which gives a very cinematic feel."

And yet the game is set in the bustling metropolis of Shanghai, a place with a population of over 20 million people. The ideal place to hide in, according to Abrack, which is what the whole premise of *Kane & Lynch* is – hiding from people who want to nail your head to the floor.

So why the 'And yet...' beginning? Well, despite the attempts to take so much influence from Western films, the setting itself



Lynch's Rab C Nesbitt look went down well.



THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Chance to right wrongs from the first game
- ✓ Setting should be interesting
- ✓ Unique camera work
- ✓ Intense action promised
- ✗ Potentially generic

THE STORY SO FAR...
**CRIME
DUOS**



BURKE & HARE
Burke was hung for murder, but Hare got off after turning his mate in.



BUTCH CASSIDY & THE SUNDANCE KID
Shot by soldiers, while they were stuck on pause.



BONNIE & CLYDE
Their killing and robbing spree ended when they were gunned down.



KANE & LYNCH
Will Kane & Lynch meet the grisly fate as their crime duo predecessors?

1827

1896

1934

2007

ETA
**MAY
2010**

"This is no time for sleeping, Kane."

"IO are going for a glossy action movie feel, except in microcosm"



has, interestingly, shaped the very flavour of the action. "Yeah, it has a lot of the feel of Hong Kong action films. It's been discussed during the usability tests that it feels a lot like Hong Kong action movies," says Abrack. "I think it's not a one-to-one inspiration between the games and the movies, though."

"Certain features are inspired by some of the American movies, like the Down But Not Dead feature, like when you're behind some cover and it breaks, or you move round a corner and get shot, you can fall down but kill the guy anyway, then perhaps start crawling about looking for cover and so on. It really prolongs the intensity of the game without you dying all the time."

Down But Not Dead is basically a second chance feature, seen in the likes of *Borderlands*. Take too much damage (*K&L2* has a magic regenerating health

"A game filled with potential wonder and China-based shootings"

system) and you'll end up downed, but you'll get the chance to take revenge and whack the guy who clipped you.

Whether it is entirely focused on killing someone to get a second wind is unknown, though. Perhaps you can crawl to cover and gradually 'get better'. It wasn't obvious from the material we were shown.

Strangely then, for a game with a focus on intense action and all that cover system/regenerating health gubbins, there's talk about focusing heavily on realism. Surely this is just a

buzzword, due to the presence of these much-derided staples of the third-person action-shooter genre?

"There's always a trade-off, where if we were to go 100% real then it would damage the gameplay, so obviously we're trying to get as close as possible to 'real' without taking the fun out of it," Abrack says.

"We have to balance fun and reality at the same time."

A LYNCHING

Some of the things that made the first game so execrable have been removed in order to focus more heavily on this 'realism' thing. The 'order Lynch about' aspect, which was just miserably awkward in the first one, has been ditched. And not just because you'll actually be playing the semi-bald nutter in the sequel.

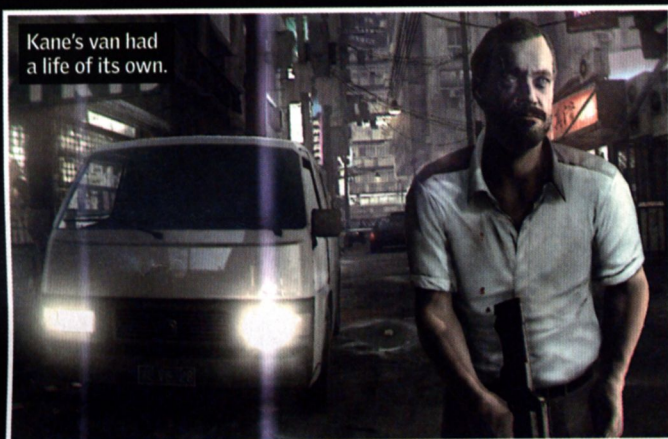
"This time you'll be playing Lynch, the self-medicated psycho character, in the single-player, and you've kind of got this guy with a camera following him around

Guess who's going to win this.



capturing the action, so you're not going to see stuff like cops with pig heads running around. You still have to keep that realism feel, but when you complete the game, you'll have no doubt this guy's a psycho."

No pig cops? Damn you, IO! But seriously, he makes an interesting point about the camera, the most distinctive



Kane's van had a life of its own.

SCENES FROM A CAMCORDER

Decoding a scene from *K&L2*

LOCATION

Shanghai is one of the biggest cities in the world, and has some of the most diverse architecture of any large urban area. Great place for gunfights then.

KANE

After the events of the first game, Kane seems more willing to let his balding friend make the decisions. That's probably going to be a very bad move.

LYNCH

You play as Lynch, the pill-popping lunatic who doesn't have the best grip on reality. Gun-related trouble follows him everywhere.

CIVILIANS

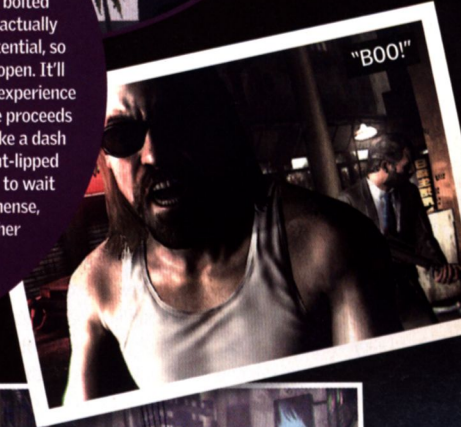
Expect the streets to be teeming with people, after all there are 20 million people living in Shanghai. Whether they will get caught in the crossfire isn't known at this time.

The Three Amigos:
Gangster Edition.

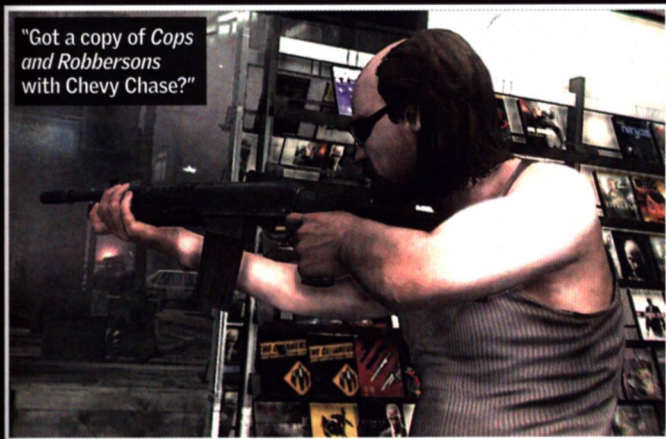


FRAGILE ALLIANCE

We know for a fact that the Fragile Alliance multiplayer mode from the first game is definitely making a return in the sequel. It was a great idea bolted onto a shoddy game, so naturally very few people actually got anywhere with it. Nevertheless, it had great potential, so we're hoping the sequel can bring this out into the open. It'll be essentially the same deal – a co-op bank robbery experience where players can either work together to share the proceeds and escape, or they can betray their friends and make a dash for personal glory. However, IO are being very tight-lipped about what new additions there are, so we'll have to wait and see what these are. As I say, it could be immense, but only if the main game gets its head together and plays well, otherwise nobody will bother with it again. Which will be a great shame.



"Got a copy of *Cops and Robbers* with Chevy Chase?"



"No shoe shine for me today bud."



element of *Kane & Lynch 2* that you might already know about. If not, it's that the viewpoint will be all YouTube-video shaky, like a guy is videotaping the proceedings with a handheld camera. (Shades of *Man Bites Dog* it seems – who'd have pegged IO for fans of obscure Belgian cinema?)

Perversely, this guy then follows Lynch about into blazing fire-fights. Presumably there are a number of suicidal home video enthusiasts in Shanghai that we've not heard about. The shakiness raises a question, though. What about motion sickness?

"We've done a lot of testing on that as well in the usability tests," Abrack explains. "It was one of the factors we were tracking, so I think, to put it

shortly, playing *Kane & Lynch 2* is like a bumpy ride in a car, a lot worse for the passenger than for the guy driving it.

"When you play the game, you discover that people can play with the camera's shakiness for a long time without getting nauseous, but we have put in the possibility in the options to turn it off, if you want. So yeah, it's a lot easier to play than look at, like when you run, the camera looks like it's controlling you, but it's not. If you're looking at a point and heading towards that point, you'll get to that point, even if it doesn't look like that."

It seems there's been a lot of testing to make sure *Kane & Lynch 2* comes out well, but does that just mean IO will be pissing on the chips of the PC users as

so many others have in the past? Well, by the looks of it, absolutely not.

"With the first game, there was one team covering all the platforms. Obviously, you'll end up primarily working on one platform, but this time around we've got a team on each one, including the PC.

IT'S NOT A PORT

"They've been spending a lot of time on the visuals and the unique visual style we have takes a lot of energy to get right on the PC, because of the higher resolution textures.

"At the same time, having the higher quality textures, you also have to have higher quality filters and stuff that go right through. They'll also be working on

the controls, so it doesn't just feel like a port, so you shouldn't feel like you must use a control pad, making them feel natural for PC players."

And with that, a sack was roughly shoved onto my head and I was bundled out of the hotel in disgrace. I don't know why they put the sack on me, I knew where I was, but anyway, I escaped with my life and have told you a tale of a game filled with potential wonder, interesting China-based shootings and lots of murder.

Kane is still there, but Lynch is your anti-hero now, and various nefarious organisations are trying to kill them yet again. It's all as it was, except for the fact that, this time, *Kane & Lynch* might actually be good. **PCZ**

WORLD OF WARCRAFT: CATAclysm

World's biggest MMO gets ever biggerer

DEVELOPER Blizzard PUBLISHER Blizzard ETA TBA 2010

BLIZZARD AND THE acronym TBA (or TBC if you prefer) go together like clotted cream and sweet strawberry jam.

Cataclysm, like everything the richest developer in the world works on, will be done when it's done. And that should be sometime in 2010, by all estimates. An expansion to the popular MMO *World of Warcraft*, *Cataclysm* overhauls most of the original zones, casting great fissures across the barrens and opening gateways through which giant raid bosses may erupt.

"We're not winding down with *Cataclysm*," laughs Shane Dabiri, lead producer on the title. "If anything I would hope that we are trying to do more. So I am really excited about *Cataclysm*. Back when we made *World of Warcraft*, there was a lot of things that we wished we could go back and do better improving upon old zones, updating old content. And I think with *Cataclysm* the *WOW* team is finally getting that opportunity to do that. And they have some awesome plans."



Goblins remind us of cheap-brewed ale.

STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC

A short while away, in this very galaxy...

DEVELOPER BioWare PUBLISHER LucasArts ETA Winter 2010



OH, HOW HOPEFUL are we, slipping *The Old Republic* into a 2010 preview feature as if it actually might show its face before the new year. It won't, of course, though it's mooted for Winter-ish release slot we fully expect BioWare's monumental MMORPG to slip right into 2011. Call us cynical, but the sheer scale of the project alone is enough of an indicator of the potential slipperiness of the title.

The four final classes have been revealed, taking the total up to eight. The Smuggler and Trooper classes on the Republic side of the fence, and the Sith Warrior and Bounty

Hunter on the Sith side, are now joined by the following chaps: The Sith Inquisitor is your Emperor Palpatine character, creepy and very evil. The Jedi Knight is as Luke Skywalker as you can get. The Imperial Agent is a Force-less, thief-style rogue. And the Jedi Consular is a bit of an Obi-Wan – clever, and more aloof than your average Force-wielder.





METRO 2033

DEVELOPER 4A Games PUBLISHER THQ ETA April 2010

WHEN YOU FINALLY get your hands on *Metro 2033*, you'll need to keep your wits about you. This is a post-apocalyptic landscape and, as such, stuff doesn't necessarily work as it always should. For example, gas masks have filters that only protect you for a limited time and your torch might be hand-cranked, providing light only for as long as you've spent charging it up. Get smashed in the face while wearing a flimsy gas mask and it might also break, exposing you to noxious fumes that you were previously protected from.



APB

DEVELOPER Realtime Worlds PUBLISHER EA Games ETA March 2010

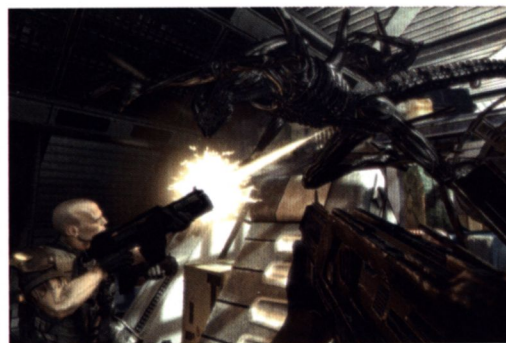
WE'VE NOT HEARD much about *APB* recently. It'll still be an MMO with a player's skill at the forefront and the use of the titular all-points bulletins to alert Enforcement players to the misbehaviour of Criminals is making us moist with excitement. It'll also be using voice technology to customise your character's own vocals with voice fronts. Also 3D positional audio will be used for communication, so you can hear just where your thug buddies are when they're battering civilians into submission.



STALKER: CALL OF PRIPYAT

DEVELOPER GSC Game World PUBLISHER bitComposer Games ETA February 2010

THE ZONE JUST got lovelier, if you happen to have a DirectX 11 card that is. All the wonders of GPU tessellation and such are waiting for you to behold them. As for tweaks to the *STALKER* template, don't expect to be selling your damaged gear to merchants anymore. They'll just refuse your advances until you get the items repaired, the cheeky swine.



ALIENS VS PREDATOR

DEVELOPER Rebellion PUBLISHER SEGA ETA February 2010

THIS GAME IS going to be dark and not just in the "rip out someone's spine and dance about celebrating" way. It's going to shrouded in gloom, so much so that, as the Marine, you'll be constantly crapping yourself as shadows flicker in your peripheral vision. And don't get me started on the facehugger threat. If this one goes full 3D, Rebellion might be responsible for a number of game-related heart attacks.

2010 PREDICTIONS



DAVID BROWN
Staff writer

Which game are you most looking forward to?

The Witcher 2, predictably enough. I'm curious to see how CD Projekt extend the story from the first game, but also to see whether they manage to maintain the same level seen in *Witcher*. Disquieting rumours about quick-time events and multi-platform development make me wary about them releasing some watered-down dross. CD Projekt: just do what you did before and it doesn't matter what platform it is on, it'll be loved by fans. Just don't compromise, damn it!

Will this year will be better for PC games?

With Microsoft and Sony not planning any new console systems for a long while, let's hope that a PC developer decides to blow all other games out of the water with some gorgeous DirectX 11 visuals, and maybe people will see things differently.

How will things change for PC gamers in this year?

Downloads will definitely continue to remain important and will certainly grow in importance as the year goes on.



PAUL PRESLEY
Freelance games hack

Which game are you most looking forward to?

APB looks like being a very strong contender for bringing viable, balls-out multiplayer *GTA* action to the PC, while letting me fulfil my dreams of running around a game world dressed like Sylvester Stallone in *Cobra*.

Will this year will be better for PC games?

2010 will be a reflective year as the great games of last year continue to make an impact. We'll see far more DLC for these existing titles being released rather than fully new games, with a lot of the 'names' promised for 2010 slipping towards the end of the year or early 2011 instead.

How will things change for PC gamers in this year?

Copy protection will run rampant as games require your webcams to see you wearing supplied publisher logo badges before they'll activate. Publishers will employ thousands of 'player monitors' to sit in darkened rooms watching everyone's webcam feeds as they play to make sure they comply. Also, game-branded cocktails will inexplicably come into vogue.

1



SETTLERS 7

DEVELOPER Blue Byte PUBLISHER Ubisoft WEBSITE thesettlers.us.ubi.com/the-settlers-7 ETA Summer 2010

MOST OF YOU could probably take or leave the Settlers series, the distinctly German town-management game that blends *Sim City* with Teutonic sensibilities like patience, numbers, thinking, and the least-affective sort of light-hearted visuals imaginable. But there's a focus on multiplayer now, which should be enough, at least, to raise the eyebrows of the island-based Europeans.

Through military, trade or science routes you must amass victory points to overtake your opponents, building your tiny village into a veritable empire and crushing all who oppose you under your sheer military, capitalist or scientific might. It should be good fun!





THE BIGGER PICTURE

1. THE PRESTIGE

Prestige is *Settlers 7*'s take on XP, and as you increase in level you'll earn rewards allowing you to build better residences to raise your population cap, better shops for new units, or new roads, so that your settlers can scoot about even faster.

2. POP YOUR LATIONS

You can't win a game of *Settlers 7* with just a handful of idiots in your village. You have to hammer out a decent population cap by constructing buildings and workyards, which makes people so randy that they start popping out babies. Who'd ever thought that medieval capitalism would make people rather randy?

3. SO MUCH STUFF

Just like in every game like it, you'll collect basic resources like wood and rocks and turn


it into guns and hats without so much as a "how's your father". You can sell the crap you make, or continually refine it until it's a weapon of some kind.

4. SPECIALS

Settlers are unique and lovely, some of them are clerics, others are generals who can influence and lead your armies, most of them are workers though, and scrawl about looking for resources before lugging them back to their workhouses.

5. CLERICAL

Just like in the olden days, before people knew what the hell was going on in the universe, clerics are scientists. They study in one of three directions: agriculture, handcraft and science. As long as they don't accidentally disprove God.



4

5



Click on the tractor
to automatically win.



Enemy unit concealed itself!



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19 MARCH
2010



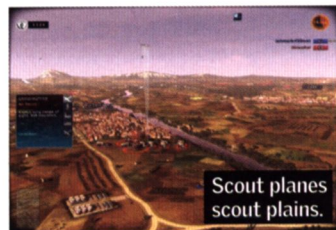
IT'S A TRAP... R.U.S.E.

Steve Hogarty wins a war with a Groucho Marx 'tache

DEVELOPER Eugen Systems PUBLISHER Ubisoft WEBSITE ruse.uk.ubi.com PREVIOUSLY IN issue 214

SO IT TURNS out that *R.U.S.E.* is going to be a bit interesting. It's a zoom-in-and-out strategy offering which scales from actual size, down-to-earth perspectives, up through the clouds, before revealing that the battle is taking place on a tabletop map, replete with military types on the phone in the background. It's like *Supreme Commander* and *World in Conflict* crossed with the model town from *Beetlejuice*.

R.U.S.E. last showed itself in Cologne, way back in 2009, where it boastfully



introduced the concept of deception to the RTS genre. Deception, claim the French developer Eugen Systems, hasn't been properly realised yet, and so *R.U.S.E.* introduces the titular: a collection of jukes, fakes, dummies and rumours intended to confound and confuse your opponent. Back then, Ubisoft would usher you out of their booth before you could properly run your face down the list of ruses, but now, in this decade of new opportunities, we can do whatever the hell we like with *R.U.S.E.*, perusing the salvo of lies and deceit as we please.

They're not terrifically interesting on paper, truth be told. Decryption reveals your opponent's orders as he makes them, so that his movements are flagged by large, colourful arrows. Spy identifies units, turning an unidentified unit's tiddlywink into an actual, visible object, thereby allowing you to attack it. Fanaticism removes your units' ability to retreat, making it possible to draw out conflicts long enough to pursue other

targets. And Decoy Army produces five dummy units, which appear to your opponent to be as real as everything else until he attacks them and they disappear in mocking wisps. These aren't sexy, game-ending tricks, rather they're appropriately subtle tools – and those are just four of the 10 we've seen.

Games begin with you in control of an HQ, and dotted about the map are supply dumps. Building depots on these

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Complex, not complicated
- ✓ Wonderful style
- ✓ Quick and tight games
- ✗ Visually confusing at times
- ✗ We're rubbish at it





2000

2002

2005

2006

ZOOMY ZOOMY NICE-NICE

R.U.S.E. will destroy your mouse wheel



FAR AWAY...

From out here you can see how war is essentially a big board game that nobody's interested in. Look, they're all doing something else. Nobody's even facing the bloody table.



...UP CLOSE

But from down here it's all real. Truly a statement about how governments think of their frontline troops as nothing more than inanimate counters and colourful beads. Lovely!



No tank bunkers getting through here.



Alh, that must be Enna Bumton.

will generate revenue and force you to extend your fronts, from here you'll need to build defensive structures – machine gun nests and fixed anti-air cannons – while closer to your base you'll be setting up barracks and tank factories to feed your frontline with fresh units.

R.U.S.E. benefits from brevity in its roster of units, there are only a handful to choose from, and as such they fall neatly

into a rock-paper-scissors arrangement. It is, in the very best sense, simple.

There are a few problems that might cause less-able players to slouch right into a petulant furrow of despair though. Units, like or unlike, are lumped together depending on how much you've zoomed in or out. At a distance, entire armies can be represented by neatly stacked tiddlywinks, with individual units only

becoming visible once you've craned your virtual neck for a closer look. Scouting is fussy too, so while specific jeeps and aerial units can be used to reveal enemy units, often the very units being fired upon won't be able to identify what sort of tank is pounding them into oblivion. There's no "Just have a bloody look, will you?" order to speak of.

These are stumbling blocks, certainly, but R.U.S.E.'s potential is being displayed in force. The short, tight one-on-one games speak of a title stripped of the haughtiness of the genre incumbents,

a complex but not complicated RTS which seemingly benefits from its cross-platform development.

STRATEGY SIMPLIFIED

R.U.S.E. is literally a game you can play with one hand tied behind your back, and while that could potentially feel shallow to nimble-fingered strategy fanatics, it'll more likely be welcomed with open arms by armchair tacticians who tremble at the sight of a nested menu. Particularly those tacticians without the use of their left hands. **PCZ**

"R.U.S.E. benefits from brevity... it is, in the very best sense, simple"

You'll be able to choose which hat to wear.

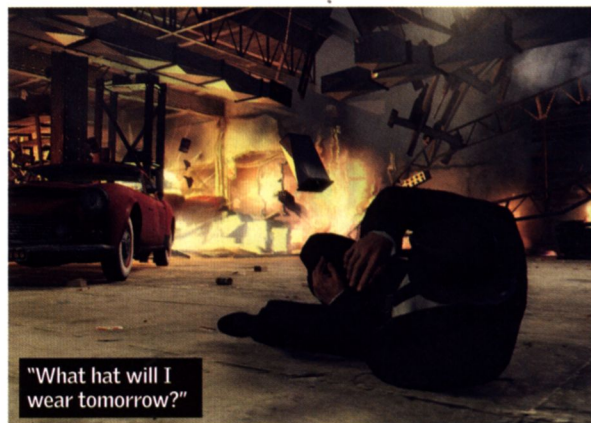
MAFIA II

A wise guy eh? Et cetera

DEVELOPER 2K Czech PUBLISHER 2K ETA Summer 2010

SOMETIME BETWEEN MAY and July of 2010 we'll finally be able to sit down and actually play *Mafia II*.

As it draws inexorably closer to release, we're almost entirely certain it'll be one of, if not our absolute favourite game of the year. The '50s setting, the open city, the classy threads, the speedier automobiles, the retro tunes. Oh, when we think of *Mafia II* we come over all sweaty.



"What hat will I wear tomorrow?"



Mini Uzis, or 'muzis' for short.

MAX PAYNE 3

DEVELOPER Rockstar Vancouver PUBLISHER Rockstar ETA Winter 2010

THE AGEING COPPER'S retired to Sao Paulo and put on a few pounds, but we're told he can still slow down time and dive about in slow-motion. He looks a lot like a chunky John McClane, and with a full 12 years between him and the events of

Max Payne 2, ol' Max has found himself working in the private security sector. But has *Payne* lost his grit? Film noir in sunny Brazil might not be on the cards, but we await his return with feverish anticipation all the same.



Expert trampolinists bounce very high.

JUST CAUSE 2

DEVELOPER Avalanche Studios PUBLISHER Eidos Interactive ETA March 2010

IF YOU HAVEN'T been paying to attention to *Just Cause 2*, you'll be interested to know it's shaping up to be surprisingly good. It also has a rocket launcher with laser-controlled rockets and a detachable mounted minigun for

those times when assault rifles won't do. Vehicles won't be skimped on either, with detachable parts flying off as you bounce around on or fire stuff at them. This could be a surprise hit, which would be a just cause to get behind. (Sorry).

"Brace yourself, Rodney."



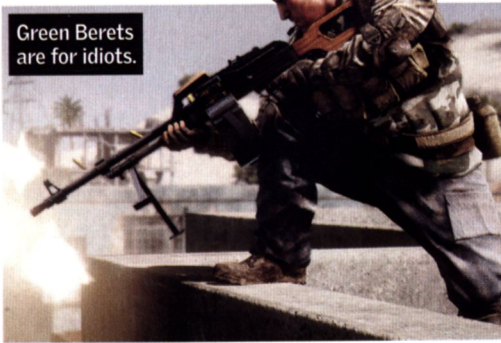
SPLINTER CELL CONVICTION

DEVELOPER Ubisoft Montreal PUBLISHER Ubisoft
ETA February 2010

WE COVERED THIS game in great depth in the last issue, so there's not much else to say that you won't already have read. But in case you missed it, *Conviction's* focusing heavily on the two-player co-op mode, which will involve you taking control of two non-Sam Fisher operatives, Archer and Kestrel. There'll also be Deniable Ops, a competitive multiplayer mode with a *Call of Duty*-style XP system to annoy/elope people.



Green Berets are for idiots.



BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2

DEVELOPER DICE PUBLISHER EA ETA 5 March 2010

WE DIDN'T GET a whiff of the first *Bad Company*, but by all accounts it was superb. An increased focus on vehicular combat actually brings the sequel closer in line with the *Battlefields* we're familiar with, but added treats like character customisation set out to make you feel like an individual rather than a faceless default soldier.

Destructible environments promise some sort of strategic side to blowing up buildings, too.

"Conviction's focusing heavily on the two-player mode"



CARRIER COMMAND: GAEA MISSION

DEVELOPER Bohemia Interactive
PUBLISHER TBA ETA Winter 2010

COLOUR US RIDICULOUSLY excited about Bohemia's remake of the seminal Atari ST classic, *Carrier Command*, in which you must take command of an aircraft carrier (yes!) and conquer an archipelago of islands by setting up bases, sailing about the place and launching controllable jet planes and amphibious vehicles armed with futuristic gadgets.

Half management, half sim, half strategy, three quarters absolutely brilliant. We can't wait.



STARCRAFT II: WINGS OF LIBERTY

DEVELOPER Blizzard
PUBLISHER Activision Blizzard ETA TBA

ONE OF THE THINGS that hasn't been discussed too much with regards to *StarCraft II* is Blizzard's plan for a Marketplace where 'premium' maps can be bought. Nobody knows how much each map will be or any of the details, although the game's lead designer has said that extremely popular *WarCraft III* mod, *Defense of the Ancients*, wouldn't be good enough to meet their quality requirements. A good idea or not, who knows? Otherwise, everything's gone quiet on the *StarCraft* front.



THE WITCHER 2: ASSASSINS OF KINGS

DEVELOPER CD Projekt PUBLISHER TBA
ETA Winter 2010

EVERYBODY'S FAVOURITE POLISH developers CD Projekt are returning with a new *Witcher* game, one that is being kept tantalisingly under wraps at the moment. We've all seen the alpha videos and things like that, so know there's going to be a potential for quick-time events to intrude on the regular combat, but there's very little other stuff we know. The title hints at following directly on from the excellent finale of the first game, so we're eagerly awaiting more news on this.

2010 PREDICTIONS



JON 'LOG' BLYTH
Columnist

Which game are you most looking forward to?

I'm always interested in seeing how PopCap will find ways to monetise the misfires of the human brain. But when it comes to exploiting mental illness, you've got to bow to Blizzard - it's *Diablo III* I'm most excited about.

Will this year will be better for PC games?

It feels a bit like the upgrade treadmill is slowing down for PCs. This is the first time I've had a PC for 18 months and not felt like I was climbing up a treacle mountain in sticky slippers. For that reason, it'll be a better year for me, personally. Unless I buy one, because I'm an idiot.

How will things change for PC gamers in this year?

I don't think PC gaming will change that much this year - we'll still have bi-monthly articles about PC gaming's death, publishers will still blame it on piracy, and the PC will still be the launch pad for incredible new talents who'll quickly go where the money is. It's the beautiful cycle of life, or something.



PHIL WAND
Hardware editor

Which game are you most looking forward to?

Battlefield 1943 because I'm still an avid 1942 player.

Will this year will be better for PC games?

Uncertain. The PC is central to the development of almost all games, regardless of platform, so it's never going to fade away.

How will things change for PC gamers in this year?

Windows 7 should make people proud to own and use a PC again. I'd wager we'll see more exclusives and an explosion of online casual games in the same vein as *Plants vs Zombies*.





FASHION VICTIM

Ohhh, we love when we discover origins of words. 'Sartorius' is Latin for 'pertaining to a tailor', and Ezio will be able to visit tailors to purchase bigger pouches for his throwing knives, smoke bombs, bullets, poison vials and medicine. He'll also be able to dye his clothes a selection of fetching colours. We like red (hides blood).



ASSASSIN'S CREED II

DEVELOPER Ubisoft Montreal **PUBLISHER** Ubisoft **WEBSITE** assassinscreed.uk.ubi.com **ETA** 19 March

THE GAME'S OUT on Xbox 360, and we'd be lying if we said we hadn't run out, bought it, played it and loved it long into the guilty wee hours of the night. It was a grumpy betrayal of our PCs, as our version won't be arriving until March, but it's left us feeling incredibly excited

about Renaissance Italy and the roof-skipping adventures of Ezio.

Two bits of DLC are sliding into the 360 version this month and next, so we're cautiously optimistic about the PC version coming with those attached. In the meantime, rest assured that *Assassin's Creed II* is

a tremendously improved and transformed version of the stylistically impressive, but ultimately lacking, first game – it's an honest contender for one of the greatest games of 2010.

As long as they don't ruin the PC version somehow. But that hardly ever happens! DOES IT.

ARMOUR, EY?

Visit a blacksmith to upgrade Ezio's armour by purchasing pauldrons, greaves and the like. You'll come into possession of a villa later in the game, where all of your weapons and equipment is proudly displayed. You can even buy paintings to hang in your Italian abode, should you wish to spruce the place up a bit.

STAFF MEETING

You can disarm enemies by putting away your own and countering right before their attack hits. Nab this staff and you can use its special attack, a 360° floor-level swipe which knocks every enemy around you off their feet. Once they're on the ground you can impale them with your death-stick, laughing all the while.

MERC FOR HIRE

Ezio can hire mercenaries to fight his battles for him, thieves to taunt guards and goad them into a chase, and courtesans to flirt with and distract soldiers. Courtesans are also walking disguises, as long as you surround yourself with them you'll appear invisible to nearby guards. Just like in real life!



The first *Dead Space*: it'll look like this.

DEAD SPACE 2

No-one can hear you scream, again...

DEVELOPER Visceral Games PUBLISHER EA Games ETA Summer 2010

SET THREE YEARS after you sawed limbs off necromorphs in the first game, *Dead Space 2* sees you plonked on the 'Sprawl', a large space station full of merry citizens going about their daily business. It's not going to end well, is it?

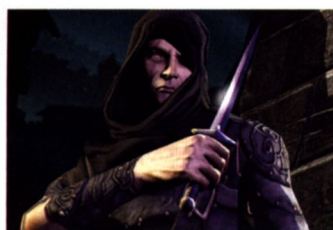
You're Isaac Clarke again, partially demented engineer-cum-warrior, who has to deal with the forces of politics and twisted necroticism once more, this time from the point of view of being there when the outbreak starts rather than when it is nearing its climax.



DEUS EX 3

DEVELOPER Eidos Montreal
PUBLISHER Eidos ETA TBA 2010

SET 25 YEARS before the original, and 45 years before the only slightly underrated *Invisible War*, *Deus Ex 3* will depict a civil unrest brought about by the introduction of cybernetics and robot-looking people walking around like regular folk. Detroit, Shanghai and Montreal are mooted as locations we'll be visiting, and mechanical (rather than nano) augmentations will see you able to turn your fist into a gun by (we're guessing here) pressing the F key. Can it possibly reach the heady heights of the original? Will it garner the accolades? Whether or not it can, it's going to be one of the year's biggest titles.



THIEF 4

DEVELOPER Eidos Montreal
PUBLISHER Square Enix ETA Winter 2010

WE STILL DON'T know anything about this, so can you stop being so tight-lipped about it, Eidos people? We don't even know if Garrett's going to be in it, for God's sake! They say it's going to be an incredibly ambitious project and will be one of the most exciting games on the market. Everyone says that sort of thing, though. Expect sneaking in the dark, more taffing than you taff your taffer at, and a series of increasingly unlikely kinds of arrow that culminates in an arrow that causes distracted guards to fall in love. The hopes of many are resting on your shoulders, Eidos Montreal. It might not even be out in 2010.



MEDAL OF HONOR

DEVELOPER EA Los Angeles
PUBLISHER EA ETA Autumn 2010

THE STRAIGHTFORWARDLY TITLED sequel to the ill-received *Medal of Honor: Airborne* aims to give the series a much needed reset, and drags it all the way to modern day Afghanistan. *Medal of Honor* is very *Modern Warfare 2*-ish, from its highly characterised taskforce to its ridiculously Hollywood setpieces. In one bit, they kick a hostage out of a window because the hostage is an honest-to-God bomb. A little bit of us wouldn't mind if they stuck to World War II to be honest, but if EA are ready to take on Activision in an action-piece arms race, we won't complain.



BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM 2

DEVELOPER Rocksteady PUBLISHER Warner Bros ETA TBA 2010

WE DISSECTED THE teaser trailer for you on page 22, and silently the previous game has become many people's game of the year, and very easily the finest superhero game man has ever bore witness to. So by all means be horrifically excited about *Arkham Asylum 2*, as it promises to relocate Bats to a twisted vision of a Gotham City repurposed to hold deranged prisoners. And oh, what? The Joker's escaped and he's doing all sorts of mad things. Sounds like a game waiting to happen.



SINGULARITY

DEVELOPER Raven Software PUBLISHER Activision
ETA Spring 2010

IT'S BEEN PUSHED back a few times, but Raven's time manipulation title should be heading our way early this year. Just to remind ourselves of what it's about, it's the one where you use a TMD (time manipulation device) to revert, age, freeze or shove objects and enemies about. It's Raven's second attempt at making a game with the Unreal Engine 3 too and one of their biggest solo projects to date. Multiplayer will be included, but no details have become available as yet.

It's curious, and mildly concerning, that it's slipped away into a new decade. And considering what a pile of shite *Wolfenstein* was, well, there's every chance that this temporal-tweaking time tango might go totally tits up. Come on Raven, prove us wrong a billion times over, please.

"There's every chance this temporal-tweaking time tango might go tits up"



SILENT HUNTER 5: BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC

DEVELOPER Ubisoft Romania
PUBLISHER Ubisoft ETA Spring 2010

APPARENTLY IT'S POSSIBLE to make hyper-realistic submarine games more so, because that's just what Ubisoft Romania are doing with *Silent Hunter 5*. There's a beginner mode for amateur U-boat enthusiasts, but there's also one where you can control every aspect of the sub on your own. Tension and fear will be added to the decisions you take, by having you run through the boat in a first-person view.



COMMAND & CONQUER 4: TIBERIAN TWILIGHT

DEVELOPER EA PUBLISHER EA
ETA March 2010

"THIS IS THE epic conclusion of the Tiberian saga," screams assistant producer Matt Ott as he rockets through the troposphere. "It's going to be the conclusion of Kane's plan, GDI versus Nod, the fate of the world, the fate of Tiberian, it's all here. It's going to wrap up the saga." It's an RTS with walking bases, and a newly introduced RPG-style levelling system. *Tiberian* is going out with a big green bang.



ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES

DEVELOPER Gearbox PUBLISHER SEGA
ETA Autumn 2010

WITH SO MUCH focus on the new *Aliens vs Predator* game, it's been easy to forget about this little number. It's still shrouded in mystery, with denials being issued forth from Gearbox about work being on the game ceasing. What we know of it so far is that concept artists who've worked on the *Alien* films have been brought in to help create an authentic feel to the game and that it will probably have co-op multiplayer. Let's hope for some more on this as the year progresses.



FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS

DEVELOPER Obsidian
PUBLISHER Bethesda ETA TBA 2010

"IT'S NOT A sequel to *Fallout 3*," booms the voice of Bethesda's Pete Hines as he floats, blimp-like, over the horizon, "it's just another game in the universe, and it has no impact whatsoever on whatever Todd Howard and his team are working on." Yup, that's because Obsidian (of *Alpha Protocol* and *KOTOR 2* fame) are developing it. Beyond that delicious little info-nugget, not a whole lot more is known about *New Vegas* (there aren't even any screenshots of it, so we nicked one from *Fallout 3*) other than that it'll be an RPG and it'll be set in Vegas. We're detectives, us.

2010 PREDICTIONS



KEITH PULLIN
Freelance games hack

Which game are you most looking forward to?

I'm not usually a *Star Trek* fan, but the recent film was good so I'm looking forward to *Star Trek Online*.

Will this year will be better for PC games?

There are a few interesting prospects for 2010 such as *BioShock 2*, *World of Warcraft: Cataclysm*, *Diablo III* and *StarCraft II* – it really will be a massive year for Blizzard if they manage to release all three of those. It's also reassuring to see new titles like *Brink* and *Metro 2033* coming through. Now that we're (hopefully) coming out of recession publishers are more likely to invest in new titles, and so I think it will be a creative year for PC games.

How will things change for PC gamers in this year?

Digital downloads will increase considerably to the point where we'll struggle to find boxed copies of games. I'm also looking forward to seeing if 'Cloud' gaming takes off.



PAVEL BARTER
Special reporter

Which game are you most looking forward to?

Half-Life 2: Episode 3. Look, I'm optimistic. In the tranquil garden of my brain, Valve are sprinkling the final bits of stardust onto the finale of the all time greatest FPS. For all we know the developers might have spent the last two years mumbling Gregorian chants, but like Gordon Freeman, turning gravity upside-down on an endless succession of alien arseholes, we can always live in hope.

Will this year will be better for PC games?

This could be the year when the indie scene breaks through, with top titles like *Machinarium* leading the way. After all, games finally seem to be succumbing to pop culture's retro circuit. Perhaps it'll lead to a return to the glory days of 2D.

How will things change for PC gamers in this year?

PC games are definitely not dead, dying, or even infected with an embarrassing disease. For chrissakes, *World of Warcraft* almost feels like a genuine country at this stage! PC games at retail are another matter altogether.



CAMPAIGN IN THE CAMPAGNE...

NAPOLÉON: TOTAL WAR

David Brown slips on a necklace of onions for this hands-on...

DEVELOPER Creative Assembly PUBLISHER SEGA WEBSITE totalwar.com PREVIOUSLY IN issue 216

WHILE IT SEEMS we've written more about *Napoleon* than any other game this year, that's an indication of just how much there is to be written about it. We've finally been able to get our hands on full-on preview code and the results, while still obviously in pre-release format, are exciting.

This is also the first time we've been able to get unfettered access to the game, with non-scripted battles and campaigns to get stuck into. There were

a few things locked off for the time being, but in general terms, we had a chance to look at every aspect of the game, except the naval combat.

Instead of just going over the general feel of the game, though, I'm going to go deep into some of the smaller things that impress and distress when plugging away at *Napoleon*.

BARE FEET

Amusingly, the most impressive things I've seen have no effect on the gameplay whatsoever.

I noticed that my unit of Revolutionary Infantry had no shoes on. This reflects the chronic lack of footwear and other basic supplies the Armée suffered from during the early years of the Revolution. Were there no sandals of

flip-flops for them? Regardless, this minor detail is a mark of just how historically accurate *Napoleon* is.

Secondly, I was watching my general (not Napoleon, in this case) chase down a routing Austrian Landwehr unit when

the two of them entered a dense piece of undergrowth.

When I zoomed in to watch the final

confrontation I noticed dandelion seeds floating about the place. It's that sort of attention to detail that I love to see in games. It makes you feel like Creative Assembly tried really hard when making this game.

When on the campaign map it's harder to see where such loving care has been put into the game's looks, because it doesn't look that different to what came

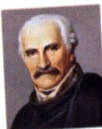
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THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Lovely little touches
- ✓ Campaign map less cluttered
- ✓ More unit variety
- ✓ More focus to campaigns
- ✗ AI still a bit dumb



THE STORY SO FAR... GENERAL KNOWLEDGE



BLÜCHER
Prussian who battled
Ney on the field of
Ligny in 1815.



NELSON
His naval victories
stopped Napoleon
beating the British.



NAPOLEON I
You get to follow in
the Corsican midget's
footsteps in the game.



WELLINGTON
Big Nose's command
style was to shout,
shout and shout again.

1742

1758

1769

1769



A bridge too far?



**COME AND JOIN
ME, FRIEND...**
Playing with yourself is
fun, but playing with
others is more fulfilling

This is how it's going to be then – you're playing a campaign on the harder difficulty settings and Austria is kicking your arse. What better way to take on those dastardly swine than by recruiting the aid of a friend to help with the fight?

At the time of writing, we don't know how this is exactly going to work. Will it be a simple 'he takes control of the enemy, you control your army' thing? Is it going to be both of you controlling bits of one army, à la *Sid Meier's Gettysburg*? We don't know yet. All we know is that the option is there, it should work through *Steam* and, hopefully, should make playing *Napoleon* a less lonely experience.



in *Empire*, except for being less cluttered. One of the problems with the original was how intimidating it was to approach a grand campaign as a major nation, because of the sheer number of things that needed investing in or controlling.

Thankfully, this isn't an issue any more, at least not when playing in the mini-campaigns. You start off small and can manage how your development goes much more easily than before. But what we've played doesn't indicate that any radical changes have been made, or are going to be made, before we get a proper copy in our hands.

The core of the game will always be the battles, at least in terms of where the fun is. The skirmishes and large confrontations with this code were all great and, without disappearing too far into review territory here, the AI is shaping up to be very, very good indeed.

Naturally, there are still some issues with decision making, but let me explain with an example: the Austrian general that attacked my pitifully defended market town made a series of brilliant and then disastrous decisions.

First, he had a general's cavalry unit to tip the balance in his favour. His two

units of infantry engaged my two, who were hidden in the forest to protect against cavalry charges.

DUMB GENERAL

Now, like any human player with an ounce of sense, he tried to get his cavalry round the flanks and the rear of my defending troops, feinting and trying to draw me out of position. I was wise to it, but it's still difficult to maintain line integrity while being harassed like that.

So far, so good, but the problems kicked in when he tried to attack. Rushing towards me, he would suddenly order his cavalry away when I tried to turn to meet him. He could have had me on a number of occasions, but chickened out and retreated. Eventually he

engaged, but I'd managed to kill enough of his horses with gunfire that he was too weak to take my unit down, especially when hampered by the trees.

Regardless of the mistakes made, the AI is definitely better than it was in *Empire*. It definitely thinks about protecting its general more (too much, perhaps, if my example is anything to go by) and will work and probe at your line. *Napoleon's* single-player games should feel much more like playing against a human opponent than ever before. It's still a little while before release and we know that CA go right down to the wire making AI and gameplay tweaks, but, going by what Creative Assembly have shown here, we have no concerns about how good *Napoleon* is going to be. **PCZ**

**"We have no concerns about how
good *Napoleon* is going to be"**

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BRINK

Steve Hogarty finds himself on the cusp of something spectacular...

DEVELOPER Splash Damage PUBLISHER Bethesda WEBSITE brinkthegame.com PREVIOUSLY IN Issue 213

SPLASH DAMAGE ANNOUNCED *Brink* would be using dedicated servers before it was fashionable. Back when saying you'd support the community in the most basic way wasn't met with rapturous applause and sighs of relief, but with the blank stare of somebody who'd been told to continue absorbing oxygen through their lungs.

"I think it speaks a lot to the background of this company that we announced we were doing dedicated servers long before it became cool," laughs Richard Ham, creative director at the Kent-based studio.

Brink is standing on the shoulders of the *Enemy Territory* franchise, which in turn was built on an unshakeable foundation of clanners, modders and online communities. Splash Damage are brilliant nerds: the door to their lunch room reads "Om Nom Nom", the management types sit behind glass doors

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sheepishly adorned with the words "Grown Ups", and CEO Paul Wedgwood will talk to you for 45 minutes about their server room, if you'd only let him. If you're looking for the soul of PC gaming, you'll find all 21 grams of it in Bromley.

"The PC hardcore resent being called 'hardcore'," notes Ed Stern, lead designer on *Brink*. "They'd rather think of

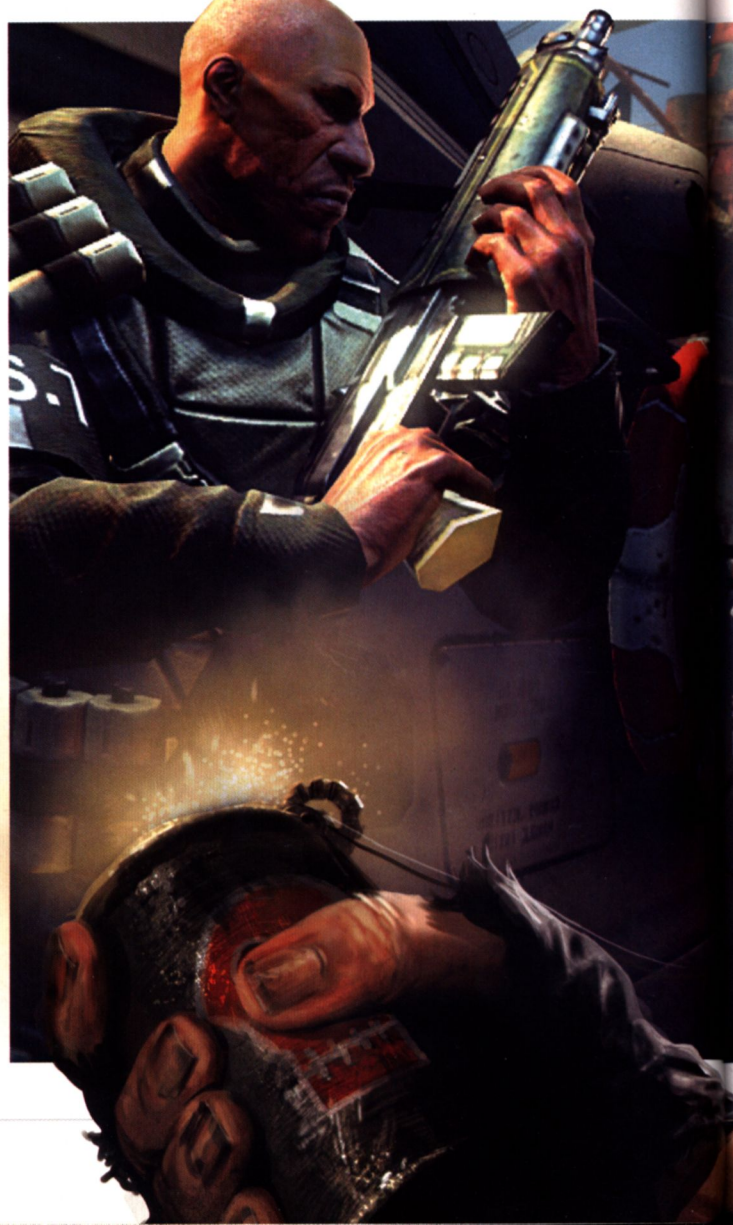
themselves as regular average Joes who just happen to know how to configure routers and customise their own servers to an extraordinary degree."

"And how to change their `autoexec.bat` and their `config.sys`" adds Ham. "For us to abandon those guys would be an epic failure on our part. Why would we burn those bridges? There's no upside to that at all."

PC LOVE-IN


Before the "hooray for the PC" sentiment can turn venomous, we turn to the business at hand. I've been invited down to Bromley to play *Brink*, the team-focused multiplayer shooter Splash Damage have been working on since *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars*, an original venture and one that's still nearly a year away from being in our grubby hands.

On offer is the chance to play through the Container City mission seen at 2009's GamesCom in Cologne from both Resistance and Security perspectives, as well as a hitherto



THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Beautiful setting
- ✓ Campaign-led multiplayer
- ✓ Two concurrent campaigns
- ✓ It's a bit like *Enemy Territory*
- ✗ It's ages away...



It's the shouty man
from the cover. Hello.

**"Splash Damage are
brilliant nerds: the door
to their lunch room reads
'Om Nom Nom'"**

unseen section: the Shipyard level, in which Security forces attempt to thwart a missile launch by those vicious Resistance terrorists.

There are two campaigns, a series of overlapping scraps between the Security and the Resistance, opposing sides of a civil war being waged across the floating city, Ark.

NO GOOD GUYS

"One of our objectives from the start was to introduce ideas to confuse and confound the player's view of what's truly going on," explains Wedgwood while Container City loads.

We know from having watched the mission played from the Security's perspective that they're tracking down a dirty bomb in the derelict, rusted settlement. Now, in the shoes of the downtrodden Resistance, we're told that the threat is actually a vaccine for "Ark flu", a substance that the fascist Security forces seek to control. Ethical ambiguity and outright misinformation will be fundamental to *Brink's* plot, and it ensures that neither side is

seen as entirely good, bad, or justified in their actions. It's a little bit clever.

Leading you to your eventual goal on any given map is a series of primary objectives, and playing as Security in Container City that first objective is to guide a maintenance bot through the maze of rusting shipping containers – retrofitted housing for the Ark's less fortunate. Conversely, the Resistance are tasked with simply stopping us.

The map works in a very similar way to *Team Fortress 2's* Payload games: the maintenance bot is a cross between Johnny Five and a Smart Car, and will only trundle forwards if there is at least one Security player nearby.

Escorting the thing, I decide, is boring and probably dangerous. Instead I consult *Brink's* objective wheel, a platter of contextual mini-missions and tasks conjured into view by pressing the middle mouse button. Point your mouse at one of these missions – be it



"Blap blap blap blap."

capturing a command post or building a machine gun nest – and release the middle mouse button to accept the mission. A quick click of the button will automatically assign you the best mission for your class.

I choose a mission to open a shortcut that allows my teammates to move forward more easily. The SMART

system – essentially a sprint key with added bells and whistles – allows me to vault elegantly through windows and over detritus as I follow the on-screen arrow to my personal objective.

As I carve a murderous path through the city, XP spills out of downed enemies, that can later be spent on useful stuff like character upgrades, new outfits, weapons, abilities and attachments.

"Ethical ambiguity and outright misinformation will be fundamental to *Brink's* plot"

That's a large chunk of *Brink*'s appeal summarised in about two minutes of play. You can shy away from front-lines to pursue smaller, optional objectives, while the omniscient ghost of character progression looms over the battlefield, pouring buckets of experience points over you whenever you do well...

Weapon attachments will include muzzle breaks for improved recoil, larger ammo clips, scopes and sights, as well as

silencers. The unlockable weapons will feature shooters like the Maximus MG, a beefy cannon used by players with Heavy-type bodies to fling copious and inaccurate rounds at shocked enemies.

And while the unlockable outfits are largely a cosmetic affair, they'll also provide some implicit information about the people you're playing with. "If somebody has the XP to buy those costumes," explains Stern, "you know

they're going to be a good player."

They'll also be more likely to have some of the weapon upgrades, which will have an undeniable effect on how you should react to their presence.

As if to prove the point, upon finishing the mission I'm gifted with a sharp SWAT outfit, replete with oppressive, eerily Soviet-style gas mask and a Kevlar jacket. There'll be chromatic similarities in the outfits you unlock too, so that Resistance and Security remain visually unambiguous. Your threads will be sartorial proof that you're a team player.

YOU BUFF MY BACK...

"Although you could theoretically grind that much XP just by headshotting other players," says Wedgwood, "it'd take an impossibly long time to achieve anything. But if you stand by a group as a Medic, doling out health to a key player and taking out enemies, your XP would grow exponentially."

"You could get more XP by not firing a single shot," adds Stern as the Shipyard map now fades into view. Myself and the other Security players spend the first few seconds trading buffs, increasing one another's strength and health. In this manner, *Brink* is built to reward sportsmanship and co-operation with experience points.

On the most basic level, each class is capable of doling out some sort of benefit to another player. Engineers can increase another player's weapon damage, Medics can boost health, and Soldiers can re-supply ammunition. These actions cost, as Splash Damage are currently calling them, pips. Using them rewards you with fistfuls of XP.

"One of the cool things about playing online," claims Stern, "is the co-operation. So the very first time you play, and somebody buffs your health, you'll get a message telling you that you can press F to buff him back, and immediately your team is better off as a result of that.

"It was a facepalm moment when we wondered why we hadn't thought of doing



**"Brink is built to
reward sportsmanship
and co-operation"**

Tattoos, threads and turtlenecks, let you customise your avatar in a near infinite-ish number of ways.

CONTAIN YOURSELF

Container City, as seen through the eyes of the defending Resistance team...

FORCED ENTRY

There are multiple routes through most maps, and bots know that if they're failing to push through one route, they need to change tactics and try to take another way around. After pinning down the advancing AI on the left hand side of this map, they began to stream through this medical ship, Hope, instead. And when that failed, they switched the grenade launchers to dislodge me and my team from our advantageous position. *Brink* is meant to be as much a single-player experience as a multiplayer one, and cunning bot AI like this is key to keeping the quality up.

SMART MOVEMENT

SMART is a semi-automated means of moving across *Brink*'s surfaces. Hold the SMART key while looking up to automatically jump to ledges, or while looking down to slide under waist-high objects.

"I think people think it's an autopilot," says Ed Stern, lead designer. "But it's nothing like that - SMART simply means you don't get stuck on furniture. We don't want people getting good at using the interface, we want people getting good at using tactics, taking cover and that sort of thing."

"If you want to do all the clicking, crouching and jumping yourself, you can. I do. I end up not using the SMART system that much, but it's great for your first time through an environment when you think: can I get up there? Yep, I can."

"Players form relationships built on a erotic-sounding foundation of mutual buffing"

➤ this earlier, but we've designed it so it costs two pips to buff yourself and one to buff a teammate. Straight away that makes it worth seeking out a teammate and doing that to one another."

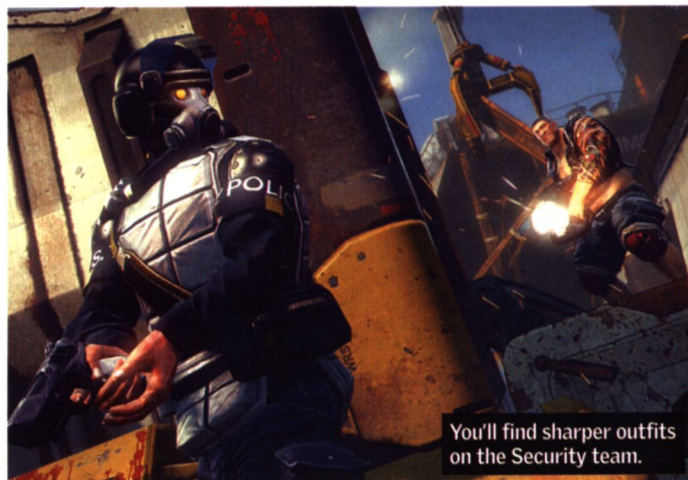
...I'LL BUFF YOURS

In this way, players are encouraged to form relationships built on a erotic-sounding foundation of mutual buffing. "That's all carrot," adds Stern. "There's no stick involved, no punishment. Even if I wanted to just farm the XP there's no efficient way to do that without helping out my team."

With Shipyard well under way, I take the opportunity to play about with the

Operative class, *Brink*'s answer to *TF2*'s Spy; or more accurately, an evolution of *Quake Wars*' corpse-nabbing Infiltrator. Downed players don't die out straight away, and in the time between them hitting the dirt and respawning (or being revived by a Medic) they can be interrogated by Operatives, an action that outlines enemy players through walls and floors for that Operative.

Operatives can also backstab, and disguise themselves as other things: bushes and lampshades are out, but members of the opposite team are in. "The Operative class has an ability they can earn to uncover enemy Operatives who are in disguise as well," explains



You'll find sharper outfits on the Security team.

Weapons can be augmented with sights and bigger ammo clips.



CAPTURE THE FLAG

The closing stage of Container City begins once the Security team reach the supposed dirty bomb with their maintenance bot and is heralded by the arrival of this here helicopter. The object, and indeed the very game type, changes from a *Team Fortress 2* Payload game to a capture-the-flag affair. The Security must bring the container to the helicopter while the Resistance attempt to prevent them from doing so. Engineers can set up sentry guns, which are highly effective in this stage of the mission, and shortcuts through the level can be opened up or destroyed by the opposing teams.

Heavy body types can wield all weapons, but are less agile. Stereotypes!



COMMAND & CONQUER

"Command posts are really powerful," announced Ed Stern, lead designer. "There's a whole sort of mini-game going on where you have to decide between going for the main objective or capturing a command post."

A captured command post allows you to replenish health and ammunition, or change weapons and class. But not only this: every command post you control gives a health boost to your entire team. Keeping them under your control, and preventing the enemy from obtaining that crucial buff, is important.

More advanced players will even be able to anticipate some knock-on effects of this: if the enemy team is without a command post, it will likely have more Medics to make up for the fact, and knowing the make-up of the opposing team's classes is probably an advantage to people who are half-decent at these games.

Who said strategy can't be part of an FPS?

Ham, "so if you're on a server where another player disguises themselves as somebody on your team, you get a mission to go and track him down. So you've got this *Spy vs Spy* mini-game going on amid the greater conflict."

"And that's a great bit of emergent gameplay," adds Stern, "because it can be a lone wolfish sort of class. It's great to get a mission that will benefit your team, you can be the counter-espionage guy hunting down other Operatives."

"Yeah, this is a team-based game," continues Ham, "and to my mind in team games it's really only ever the Medic who has the sort of tools to support other players."

"In this game, as you've noticed, every class has a reason to reach out and touch another player, even at level one. Soldiers can dole out ammo, Engineers are able to buff their teammates' weapons. The Operative is the odd one out, he doesn't have the means to reach out and touch a teammate, instead he reaches out and touches the enemy."

Use the objective wheel to select a mission to hunt down an enemy Operative, and the sneaky chappy is warned of your intentions with a curt "They're on



to you," from his commander. He'll be aware that you're on your way to his location, and will adjust his play style accordingly. In other words, he'll be expecting you.

Downed players waiting for a revive syringe from a Medic will also have to consider nearby Operatives, if they dawdle for too long they risk an interrogation, thereby compromising the locations of everybody else on the team.

DRAMATIC DEATHS

"Just because you're down does not necessarily mean that you're out," claims Ham, hinting at some unlockable abilities for use once you're incapacitated. "It doesn't mean that you've stopped playing the game and there's nothing for you to do – particularly if there's a sneaky Operative coming to interrogate you..."

Can we expect a surprise, post-death grenade blast, à la *Modern Warfare's* martyrdom perk? Perhaps. "Some of the

abilities haven't made the cut because they're overpowered or aren't fun," says Ham. "But we hope to have as much gameplay in our death mechanics as most games do in their life mechanics."

In Shipyard, I've reached the missile controls by flouncing past the enemy defences while disguised as one of their own. There's a distinct feeling that, with a year to go, the AI hasn't yet learned to

rout out disguised enemy Operatives in their midst. Not even the ones who are cheerfully hacking control panels in an attempt to activate the missile's self-destruct sequence. It took an accidental shotgun blast to a tattooed enemy face before they registered that I was not, in fact, a member of the Resistance.

The hacking works remotely. The closer you are to the console-to-be-

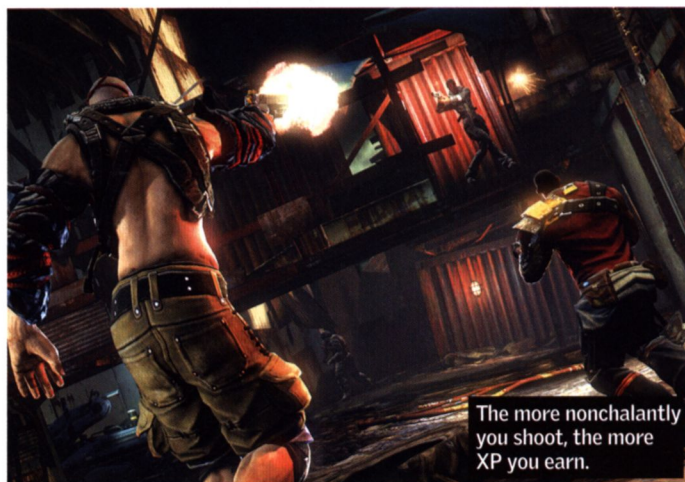
hacked, the quicker the job gets done. Conversely, the further away you are, the better chance you have of surviving the torrent of players turning up to see what all the hacking is about.

Your hacking tool, alarmingly, emits a beeping sound to proudly convey what an excellent job of hacking it's doing, a sound that, unsurprisingly, can attract unwanted attention. Ducking into a nearby container was a sufficient tactic in my case, with no less than two Resistance members glibly strutting past my hiding place while I sabotaged their missile launch.

OLD DEARS WELCOME

Successful, I'm plied with more XP, levelling up and earning a credit to spend on an ability (one which allows me an opportunity to revive myself).

Key to the experience, as Splash Damage tells it, is making sure that both new and veteran players know exactly what they're doing at any given moment. Accessibility is the word they avoid – as Ham insists, "We're not making *Brink* accessible to little old ladies." Instead



Brink is basically a game about pointing guns and falling down.



The mission wheel means even this fella knows what to do next.

they're striving to ensure that no part of the game will be complex enough that it could deter the first-time player.

"A lot of multiplayer shooters are very unforgiving," explains Ham, "everybody gets thrown into the deep end of the pool and you sink or swim. And a lot of people just drown."

"If that happens on *Brink* that's a failure on our part. We're working to

make sure you won't come across terrible anti-social behaviour."

"Voice chat defaults to off," adds Stern, seemingly overlooking that insults, racism and trolling are as much a part of PC gaming as the dedicated servers Splash Damage so cherish. "Why on Earth would voice chat ever default to on? What

beautiful world do people live in where that's a really good idea?"

The objective wheel mitigates that immediate need for voice chat. Anything you choose to do is announced only to the players it might be relevant to, and if further co-ordination is required it's a simple task to turn it back on.

ALL IS NOT ROSY

And it could all change too, with almost a year until the thing's finished. As it stands *Brink* feels like a solid FPS, and one astounding in its distinct, detailed visuals and impressive (given the stage of development) aurally too. Approach a flashpoint in Container City and the world erupts in a molten cacophony of pings, whips, cracks and fwumps – a sumptuous wall of sound.

What's becoming clear are the depths and intricacies of *Brink*'s classes, and the ways in which they'll be able to interact. But harder to put a finger on without some intensive playtime are the systems, tactics and strategies that should naturally form naturally around these class relationships.

Just as concerning is the challenge Splash Damage face in girding the loins of PC gamers without the familiar tags of *Quake* and *Wolfenstein* in the title, or even their own *Enemy Territory*.

Brink is a brave and bold move, that's being made with a refreshing focus on the PC at a time when things felt to be slipping in the wrong direction. Splash Damage's dedication is as unwavering as their ambition – and *Brink*'s promising something very special indeed. **PC37**



"Brink is a brave and bold move, that's being made with a refreshing focus on the PC"

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PCZONE Reviews

Our verdict on the
latest PC games



GHOSTS

SERIOUSLY NOW, I heard a ghost when I was 11. All the taps in the bathroom started gushing loudly one night, and when I ran to investigate the room was mockingly silent. Then, as I crawled back into bed, there was a crash in the bathroom – the shelf above the bath had fallen, throwing shampoos everywhere. It was a supernatural mess! Derek Acorah meets Kim and Aggie, in my bloody bathroom!

But what does this have to do with me? I hear you ask. This shocking whimsy isn't worth the subscription fee! I hear you complain. No please, wait. My point is that no game's ever scared me as much as a thud in my tub. The full spectrum of horror, as a foul-smelling entertainment medium, isn't properly represented in games. It's effected (albeit well) either with decade-old mechanics (à la *Silent Hill* and *Resident Evil*) or cheap ghost train scares (à la *F.E.A.R.*). The gut-wrenching tub-thumping terror of *Paranormal Activity* can't be found in games. So could somebody do a game of the film, please?

Steve Hogarty

Steve Hogarty
Deputy editor

MUST BUYS!



PCZONE Classics are hard to come by, and when you see one you should drop to the floor and refuse to move until someone buys you the game...



Fallout 3 Left 4 Dead 2 Empire: Total War

76 ROGUE WARRIOR

A semi-autobiographical FPS: the birth of a new genre, or its stillbirth?

THE PC ZONE BADGES



CLASSIC

(90%+)
Games scoring in this bracket are air-punching, heart-soaring triumphs. Buy them.



RECOMMENDED

(75-89%)
Head-turning, if not eye-popping, games. But then, who wants their eyes popped?



DUMP

(0-19%)
PCZONE's dirty protest. If a game is bad, we won't shirk our duty.



ONLINE ONLY

Don't have an internet connection? Then you're wasting your time with this game.



EXPANSION PACK

See this and you're going to have to get the original to play the expansion. We know – life's not fair.



ON THE DVD

Good news! Check out the cover DVD for a playable demo or movie.

THE PC ZONE GAMING MACHINE

As you'll see on the many pages of resplendent reviews that follow, we list the minimum specifications you need to play each game in each review. Please refer to the publisher's website to check out their recommended optimum specs that'll make the games super-whizzy. We review all new games on a variety of systems, including our top-spec, very desirable Xworks X81-C17 (pictured right). For more info on Xworks, tap into the wonder that is the internet and type the following selection of letters into your browser: xworksinteractive.com.



ALSO REVIEWED

- 78 DIVINITY 2: EGO DRACONIS**
Can Larian's new *Divine Divinity* sequel stand up to the demands of a new decade?
- 80 LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE: SIEGE OF MIRKWOOD**
Battle in skirmishes beyond the Misty Mountains. Enough to satisfy the Tolkien addicts?
- 81 EUFLORIA**
We loved this ambient strategy game when it was an indie title. Now is it a good full-price game?
- 82 TALES OF MONKEY ISLAND: RISE OF THE PIRATE GOD**
With the release of the final episode we take a look back at the whole series.
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Two-dimensional dogfighting makes a comeback.
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Find out how DICE's free-to-play online shooter has evolved.
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PCZONE SWEARS...

- ✓ To only review code signed off by the publishers and the developers
- ✓ To give you our honest opinion. We're gamers. We love games. And we hate bad ones. Just like you
- ✓ To tell you if a company refuses to send a game to us before it's on sale. There's always a reason
- ✓ To hang up on companies who say that 79% isn't a good score. What do they know?
- ✓ To listen to you if you think we've got something wrong. Email us at letters@pczone.co.uk

"Oh yeah baby!
Feel the love!"

ROGUE WARRIOR

David Brown wishes he was watching *The Wrestler* instead of being a Dick

DEVELOPER Rebellion
PUBLISHER Bethesda
WEBSITE roguewarrior.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

AT A GLANCE...

Get to grips with the bearded face of Richard 'Demo Dick' Marcinko and slaughter loads of Communists in the process.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
3.4GHz processor, 1GB RAM (2GB Vista), and a 256MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

MODERN WARFARE 2 94%

SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II: DOUBLE HELIX 92%

ROGUE WARRIOR 34%

NO-ONE ASSOCIATED WITH this game would send us a copy of it, so we had to buy it. Make of that what you will. In fact, let me develop this little theme a little further. Don't worry, I've got time and space, as describing the game and what happens in it won't last long at all.

Rogue Warrior is a game that's all about first impressions. In that it never actually gets them right. First of all, the menu doesn't have mouse support. Neither does it have a subtitle option (that I could find) or any others beyond the fundamentally basic. Even my refresh rate was locked at 60Hz, even though the desktop I'm writing these words on is flickering away at 75Hz.

But, of course, menus aren't everything. It's just that the next first impression, the gameplay one, is just as bad. The graphics are, to put it mildly, ghastly, as are the game mechanics. It's like being transported back to the days of *Soldier of Fortune II*, which at least was good for its time. This one isn't good, at all. It's criminally easy, with only a puzzling recharging health system to

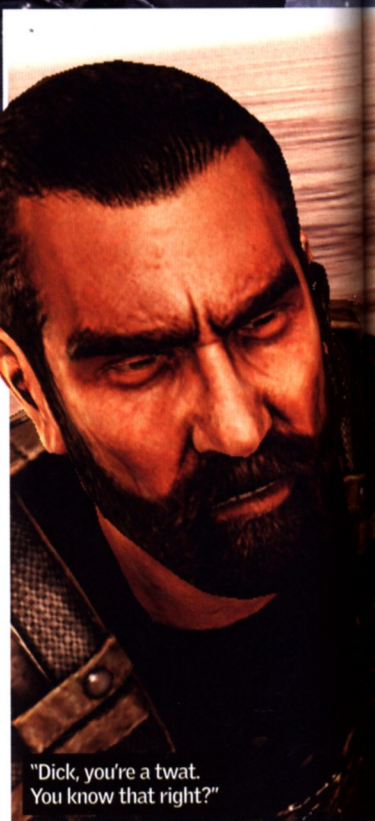
indicate you've been wounded or are close to death. Sometimes you just die with virtually no warning, as bullets suddenly dish out 15 million times more damage than they did two seconds ago.

HEAD BACK

Generally *Rogue Warrior* is really easy, though. It's also astonishingly short. On normal difficulty, it will take an average-skilled FPS player around 2.5 hours to complete the entire thing. And yes, it does cost £30.

The actual action is as old-fashioned and generic as its graphics, but it's just all by-the-numbers stuff, although you do get to perform some kill moves on enemies, which are brutal and satisfying to an extent. Still, you feel that the whole thing could break at any moment, and sometimes it does.

The cover system seems to be an unnecessary addition, because often it just screws up the game when you try to use it. Serious clipping problems abound: at one point an attempted snap-to-cover move landed me flailing about in the scenery, and unable to defend myself



"Dick, you're a twat.
You know that right?"



against the five Communists who were blasting me with AK-47s. Luckily, there are checkpoints every couple of metres, so it wasn't overly annoying.

You might not be swearing, but your character certainly will be. In fact, he never, ever stops swearing. That aged classic *Kingpin* might just have a new

BACK TO BASICS

The problem with the multiplayer portion of *Rogue Warrior* is that it's just another example of the lack of imagination and effort put into this project by Rebellion. All you get is Deathmatch and Team Deathmatch modes, just with more screen tearing and stuttering than other games of this kind. There's nothing here to inspire anyone, so you'll have a mission finding anybody playing the thing. I mean, there's not even a Capture the Flag mode, which just goes to show how little effort was put in. What a waste of time.

"Why did I put my name to this? Why?"



"Ha ha, that tickles."

"A real dog's dinner... clearly put together with little effort or care"

rival for its title of "Game With Most Expletives Ever". Perhaps the most perplexing contradiction when considering *Rogue Warrior* is how they managed to get Mickey Rourke to provide the voice for main character Richard Marcinko, who was a real-life Navy SEAL and counter-terrorist special ops type back in the '80s. They must have got him to do it before *The Wrestler* hit the big time, unless he happens to know Marcinko or something.

Anyway, Rourke's talents are expressed in the form of the words "fuck", "balls", "hairy", "suck", "cock" and "Commie". There are others, like "it" and "is", but generally that's the extent of his character's vocabulary. Throw in some bravado about disobeying orders and stopping a Cold War missile plot and you've got the plot in a nutshell.

Rogue Warrior couldn't be more like a bad '80s action movie if it tried. Stupid chief? Check. Burly warrior who doesn't take orders from liberal sissies? Check. Brutal stabbings, knifings and shootings? Check. It's a pity there isn't a character with a huge pushbroom moustache, chainmail vest and ridiculous flat-top to scream at you in the finale. In fact, the finale isn't really any different to the rest of the game. Nice work there, Rebellion.

So there you have it. *Rogue Warrior* is a dog's dinner of a game, put together

with little effort or care. As with Rebellion's last game, *Shellshock 2: Blood Trails* (issue 206, 32%), this one has left us worried about what the new *Aliens vs Predator* game will actually be like when it's released. The chances are they're saving up all their good ideas for that game (we hope they are), but *Rogue Warrior* and *Shellshock 2* don't fill us with much hope. **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Grotesque
SOUND Sewer language
MULTIPLAYER Lacking any inspiration

- ✓ Brutal kill moves
- ✓ Unintentionally comic swearing
- ✗ Archaic visuals
- ✗ Archaic gameplay
- ✗ Archaic multiplayer
- ✗ Ridiculously short

34

A short and curly



Love those flat flames.



Rhode
But in any case, before we go, I want you to enter the tomb in the back of the chapel.

1. To what purpose?
2. I never pegged you for so morbid a person, Commander!

Mindread



DIVINITY 2: EGO DRACONIS

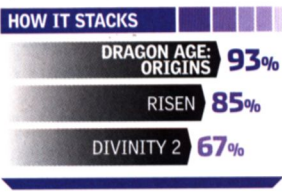
David Brown's diary makes for interesting reading, if you like Belgian RPGs

DEVELOPER Larian Studios
PUBLISHER DTP Entertainment
WEBSITE divinity2.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

AT A GLANCE...

A curious blend of Germanic RPG and modern clicky-clicky action game that has some good ideas, but still ends up only being average.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
1.8GHz processor, 1GB RAM (2GB Vista), and a 256MB graphics card (512MB Vista) with Shader Model 3.0.



REVIEWER'S LOG, DAY 1,
Stepped into the wilds of Rivellon, generically named place that *Ego Draconis* is set in. Before this, was greeted by extraordinarily uninspiring intro sequence that told me nothing whatsoever about the game, except it has some wizard guy who likes an amulet in it. Not the best start.

Press on regardless. Character creation is weak, with very few options to choose from. Select name Jiggly Jones, but get called Slayer all the time anyway by Identikit peasants. All the men in this game look exactly the same, it seems. At least, the non-important ones do. It's not even hidden very well, they're just carbon copies. They all sound terrible as well, very poor voice acting. Must note this down, as criticised *Risen* for this in *On The Hard Drive* piece few months back. Maybe it'll get better, but know it won't. A shame.

Reviewer's Log, Day 2: The game's all about killing dragons, or people who can

turn into dragons anyway. Apparently, I get to turn into a dragon later on, but doubt I'll ever get that far. Sounds cool, though. I also get the chance to own my own 'battle tower' with servants and everything. Will I survive that far even? Combat seems fiddly, hard to kick rabbits to death even when they're standing still. Chickens and ducks also.

Am in small village, where I get taught ranger, warrior or magician skills. Appears you can level up other class' abilities if you wish. Want to be a warrior-mage wielding dual weapons.



Reviewer's Log, Day 3: My eyes have gone a strange colour and all my training has been wiped. Basically a way of doing the whole amnesia storyline thing without actually having you wake up from a coma on a beach or something.

Everyone still calling me Slayer. At least they could have Slayer do the soundtrack if they're going to name check them so much.

Have to admit, world looks beautiful, some lovely scenery going on. A pity all the people look the same. Oh yeah, had mentioned this already. Still, needed to be reiterated, I think.

More chickens dead, getting the hang of the combat a bit more now. It's not easy and will never feel great, but it's not as bad as I thought it was.

Reviewer's Log, Day 4: Ploughed through lots of enemies now, done some side quests that involve going to



Beauty is in the eye of this Beholder.

BEDLAM IN BELGIUM

A quick search of the internet and a resulting visit to Wikipedia later, I only managed to find two games companies that come from Belgium. One was called Hyperion, who apparently "specialise in porting Windows games to Amiga, Linux and Macintosh" systems.

The other one was Larian Studios, the guys behind *Divinity 2: Ego Draconis*. They also did the previous two titles in the *Divinity* saga, but other than that, they've not done anything else of note, other than something called *Adventure Rock*, which was previously called CBBC World. Not the most impressive of track records, but to make up for that they do have a wonderful carrot museum in Berlotte.

"Would you hire Mr T to take some berries to a friend's house for you?"

place A and returning with items B. The usual RPG shit that's bored me to death in hundreds of other games. Why can't these people sort their own lives out? Would you hire Mr T to take some berries to a friend's house for you?

PITY THE FOOL

Reviewer's Log, Day 5: It's taken a while, but it's definitely possible to get into this game. Isn't as good as *Risen*, but first impressions of hellish borefest dispelled over time. Menu screens still really sluggish and laggy for some reason, don't know why.

Love the fact each skill in the game is accompanied by demonstration video. Really nice touch.

The quest reward system is also well presented, gives you a welcome choice over what you get rewarded with – more experience, gold or items.

Female NPCs seem to react to Jiggly same way they'd react to a male PC, offering flirty sexual advances instead of

woman-to-woman thanks. Am not woman, but imagine they don't do this to each other in real life. If they do, want to see it more often. I've said too much.

Reviewer's Log, Day 6: Have seen enough now. Not enjoying it as much as *Risen* or *Dragon Age: Origins*, nowhere near as good as *The Witcher*, but good, solid game in it's own right. Part of old, respected series, but doesn't matter if you haven't played the others – *Divine Divinity* and *Beyond Divinity*.

Like the *Blackadder* reference to Merlin the Happy Pig I discovered as a dialogue option. Good attention to detail there.

Time to sign off from this diary now. Don't think *Divinity 2* do well in England – still too quirkily European for British audiences – but those who play it will have decent time. Still a little perplexed by the intro, though. **PC7**



PCZONE

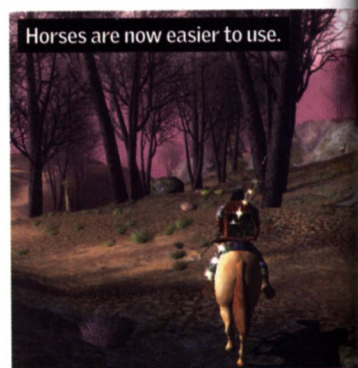
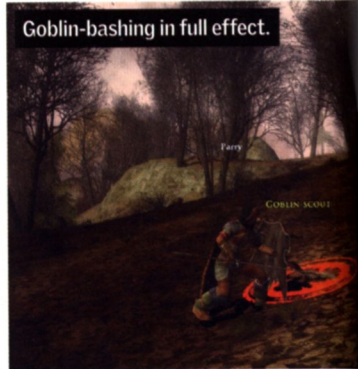
GRAPHICS Often gorgeous
SOUND Dreadful voice acting
MULTIPLAYER Not at all

- ✓ Looks great
- ✓ A grower
- ✓ Not a short game
- ✗ Terrible voice acting
- ✗ Tedious side quests
- ✗ Combat is fiddly

67

Far from divine

Is it pregnant or portly?



THE LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE: SIEGE OF MIRKWOOD

Steve Hill can't see the trees for the wood...

DEVELOPER Turbine
PUBLISHER Codemasters
WEBSITE lotro-europe.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £14.99



AT A GLANCE...

The Lord Of The Rings Online gets another expansion pack that should keep the faithful happy.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
1.8GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 64Mb graphics card. Internet connection required.

HOW IT STACKS

LOTRO: SHADOWS OF ANGMAR **87%**
LOTRO: MINES OF MORIA **85%**
LOTRO: SIEGE OF MIRKWOOD **76%**

IF YOU'VE MANAGED to get to level 60 in *The Lord Of The Rings Online*, the chances are that you like it. That's the entry point for this expansion, which after whacking goblins in the gloomy Mines of Moria sees you whacking goblins in the mirky woods of Mirkwood.

Once they've adapted to the various shades of brown, Tolkien fans will of course recognise it as the starting point for the epic battle of Dol Guldur Tower, which you can eventually participate in as part of a massive three-part 12-man raid that sees you take on a Ring Wraith: one of Sauron's Nazgûl, no less.

And if that means nothing to you, just follow the instructions, carry a big stick and hit anything that moves. War is very much in the offing, and instead of

meditating in the lush pastures of Lothlorien, you need to be ready to take arms against any pointy-eared twat that may cross your path, with some intense battles from the start.

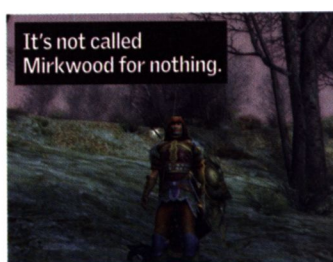
In the process you may find yourself levelling up to the new cap of 65, which may not sound much, but in reality is laborious for all but the most sleep-deprived loners.

A FOREST

The further levelling is little more than footnote however, as the real novelty of Siege of Mirkwood are the all-new skirmishes. These are essentially bespoke instances that give the more time-conscious gamer the opportunity for a quick blast of action without turning into a hobbit.

Apart from the final assault in the Dol Guldur Tower, the skirmishes can be undertaken by three or six players, or even on your own. There have been complaints about the paltry rewards to be garnered from them, but as ever the game is in constant flux, and the addition of Mirkwood also enforces some significant improvements to the key game.

Essentially though, this is the same old *Lord Of The Rings Online*. If you've yet to be tempted by the series, or indeed any MMO, this is a reasonable place to start – a genuinely massive fantasy world where lowly hobbits rub shoulders with evil wraiths. Crucially, with this expansion pack – and regular updates – it looks as if it's going to be around for some time. **PCZ**

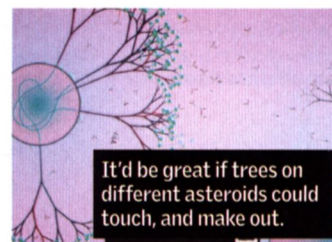
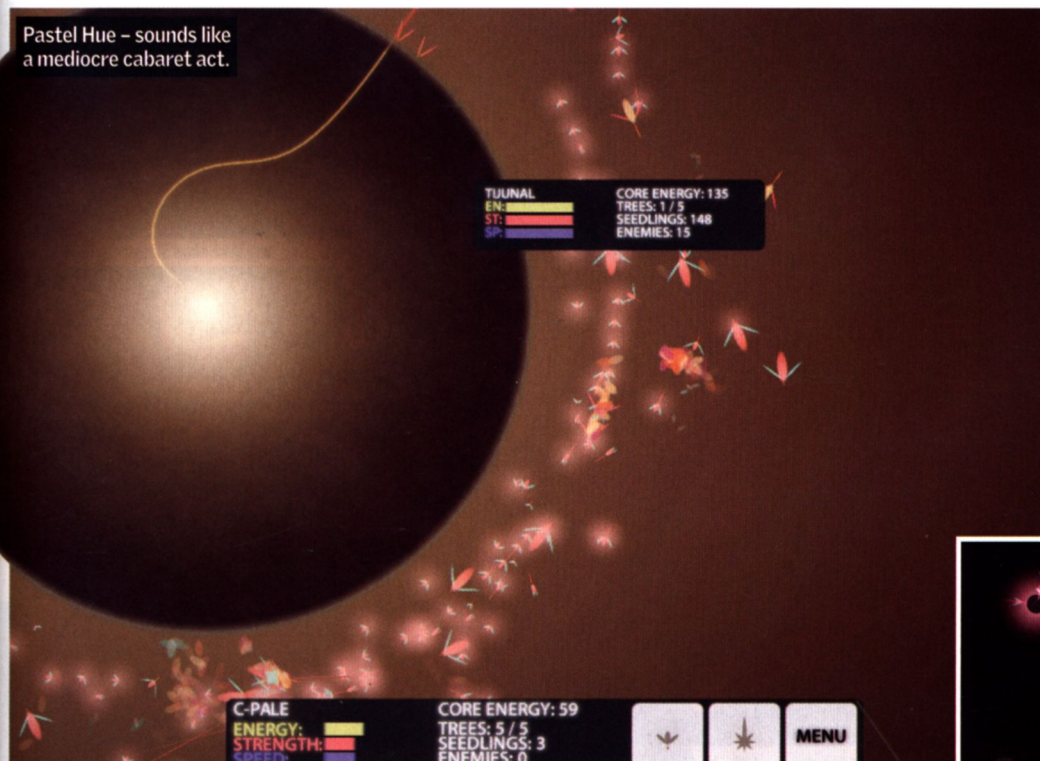


GRAPHICS Brown
SOUND Reasonable
MULTIPLAYER Naturally

- ✓ More content
- ✓ New skirmishes
- ✓ Epic story
- ✗ Same old grind



Pastel Hue – sounds like a mediocre cabaret act.



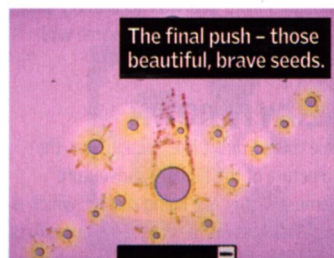
EUFLORIA

Jon Blyth dominates the galaxy with just his seed

DEVELOPER Alex May, Rudolf Kremers
PUBLISHER Steam
WEBSITE eufhoria-game.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £15

THIS IS A difficult game to review. As it's a minimal, ambient strategy game, there are few well-known and similar titles to refer the reader to. As this is the best way to avoid describing a game, anyone reviewing *Eufhoria* is forced to actually describe it, sponging up valuable words that could be used on bum jokes.

In *Eufhoria* you control an empire of seedlings, intent on colouring a small galaxy of asteroids with their pastel hue. An asteroid can be claimed by planting trees – these Dyson trees produce more seeds, inheriting the qualities of their parent asteroid. In two sentences, I've managed to describe a huge part of the game. You can also plant defence trees which don't produce seeds, but deploy mines that will destroy enemy seeds.



These seeds are pretty autonomous, so beyond telling them where to go, and which of the two trees to plant, they'll buzz around the surface of the asteroid in a satisfying display of swarm AI.

Zooming in and out to watch the procedural graphics at work is a pleasure, but with such slow (and to a seasoned gamer, shallow) gameplay, you'll find yourself zooming in and out more often than is healthy; like rocking backwards and forwards and hugging your knees.

GARDENER'S GALAXY

Seeds are your currency, your soldiers, and using weak seeds to plant Dyson trees on a strong asteroid is an immediate priority. The final elements of the game, which come into play during the second half of levels, are flowers. These are occasionally made by mature trees and can be attached to a tree to strengthen it.

There are also laser mines, powerful objects that can greatly boost an asteroid's defence, or spearhead an attack into enemy territory.

And... that's it. The game's design – both in terms of its appealing minimal look, and the beautifully intuitive one-handed control system – is fantastic.

It's a masterclass in usability. But this is why *Eufhoria* is truly difficult to review – I have to balance my substantial respect for the tiny team of developers against the fact that *Eufhoria* is an extremely shallow and over-priced puddle, then produce a single number.

Curious, patient gamers add 20. People who tut and fume when the person in front is walking fractionally slower than they'd like to, piss off. **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Beautifully procedural
SOUND Lovely ambience
MULTIPLAYER Nada

- ✓ Beautiful procedural graphics
- ✓ Incredibly intuitive UI
- ✓ Ambient soundtrack
- ✗ A test of patience
- ✗ Most levels can be won by waiting

63
 Case of love or hate

AT A GLANCE...

A strategy game that takes minimalism to a visually striking – and often hollow – conclusion.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
 1GHz processor and 512MB RAM. At time of writing, *Eufhoria* doesn't work with Intel's mobile integrated GPUs.

HOW IT STACKS

PLANTS VS ZOMBIES 82%

OSMOS 82%

EUFLORIA 63%

Threepwood was
useless in pub quizzes.

I still have no clue what "rue" means.

This doesn't
look good.

So where's Benny?

An undead
orangutang.

THE TALES OF MONKEY ISLAND: RISE OF THE PIRATE GOD

David Brown often looks like he's just dug himself out of a grave

DEVELOPER Telltale Games
PUBLISHER Telltale Games
WEBSITE telltalegames.com/monkeyisland
ETA Out now
PRICE \$34.99 (£21)
for five episodes



AT A GLANCE...

The saga closes as loose ends are tied up, and more are created. It's just like an episode of *Lost*, except you always know where you are.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
2GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and
a 64MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

MONKEY ISLAND: RISE
OF THE PIRATE GOD **84%**

SAM & MAX 2.5: WHAT'S
NEW, BEELZEBUB? **84%**

STRONG BAD 1.5:
8-BIT IS ENOUGH **82%**

THE END IS here, the series that could so easily have been a thundering disaster has turned out to be a pleasant surprise, on the whole. Despite having perhaps some of the lowest lows of any major Telltale series, it also has the highest highs, averaging out somewhere in the "ah, that was nice" zone when you finish all five episodes. Most importantly, it leaves you wanting more, which is always a good sign.

Anyway, to the game. No spoilers here, but let's just say Guybrush has ended up in a place reserved for those who aren't as healthy as they'd like to be, and he has to find a way back to save his wife and so on.

This episode contains everything that's right and wrong with the series. The rehashing of character models is criminal, but the locations are interesting

and the concept is engaging. This time, though, the puzzles are generally pretty easy, with only one or two moments that might be classified as tricky.

Generally, this is a bad thing, but the episodic nature of the new *Monkey Islands* means you're wanting to just see how things turn out. Imagine a TV show that gets to its final episode and then drags itself out for too long, frustrating

There's little more frustrating than trying to examine your surroundings only for the game to then force you into a different bit before you've had a chance to think things through. It seems a strange thing to do, because every other time Telltale have used this system – the beginning of *The Siege of Spinner Cay*, for example – you've been able to control when you jumped to the next section.

"Pirate God is a worthy way to end this series; one that got better as time has gone by"

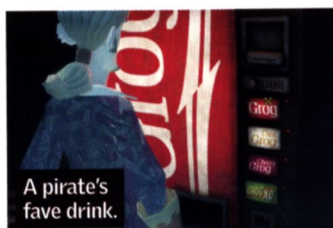
the viewer by not getting to the point. It comes down to whether you value puzzle difficulty over plot development. I lean more towards the latter, so I thought *Pirate God* was acceptably easy, but I know a few others disagree with that opinion.

SLOW IT DOWN

One thing I didn't like, though, was the structure of the finale. In adventure games, I never like being rushed, which is why I always preferred the old LucasArts games to the Sierra ones, on the whole.

This time, there's no choice on your part, you just get shoved into it. It just makes you waste your own time waiting for the cycle to get back to the bit you need, denting the momentum built up during the rest of the game. Also, the length of the episode has clearly been artificially extended by creating lots of small areas that involve a deal of trekking between each one. It's not that bad, but it does get a bit frustrating having to zigzag between these places all the time.

Having said all this, these aren't massive blows to the quality of the game,

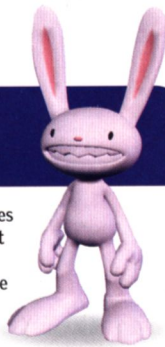


MEASURING STICK

How Telltale's adventures match up

We took the score assigned to each game in all Telltale's major series and created this handy average-o-meter chart for you to gauge just how good each series is on the whole.

As was expected, they were all around the same area, as Telltale know how to make really good adventures. However, they haven't cracked that Classic boundary yet.



SAM & MAX: BEYOND TIME AND SPACE 80.2%

TALES OF MONKEY ISLAND 80%

STRONG BAD'S COOL GAME FOR ATTRACTIVE PEOPLE 79.2%

SAM & MAX SAVE THE WORLD 77.83%

WALLACE AND GROMIT'S GRAND ADVENTURES 72.25%

Well, that's really comforting. Thanks.

Face it, Threepwood. LeChuck has more power than any pirate could possibly dream of! And besides, you're dead now.

especially when you take this episode as part of a large whole, rather than a one-off game. *Pirate God* is a worthy way to end this series; one that got better as time has gone by, even if some lessons were never really learned.

Telltale have produced a set of five vignettes that has in no way let the side down, remaining faithful to the original *Monkey Island* games, while providing a forward movement to keep things from getting stale.

If you've been holding out to see how things developed, hold out no longer. You can come out from your hiding place, safe in the knowledge that a purchase of this series won't leave you peeling off your skin in anguish.

While *Tales of Monkey Island* failed to hit the heights of *Secrets of Monkey Island 2*, as a new start for Guybrush, it's a good 'un and it's proof that Telltale have mastered the episodic game. **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Good, but character models still reused
SOUND Veers from great to grating
MULTIPLAYER None

- ✓ Worthy ending to the series
- ✓ Interesting concept
- ✓ Guybrush is still great
- ✗ Puzzles might be too easy for some people
- ✗ Some niggly issues remain unresolved

84

Back from the dead



ALTITUDE

Pretty fly (for an indie game)

DEVELOPER Nimble Games
PUBLISHER Nimble Games
WEBSITE altitudegame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £6.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
1GHz processor, 256MB RAM, and a 64MB graphics card.

WELL, COLOUR ME tickled pink and more than mildly surprised. I have to say I wasn't expecting anything other than some tosspiece indie game with some grand idea but flaccid gameplay creakily holding the whole thing up. Thankfully, there's no sagging game flesh hanging off this robust gaming torso. It's a fighting fit machine, the gaming equivalent of a training montage in an '80s action film.

Imagine an airborne version of the original *Micro Machines* games, cuddly little vehicles chugging about the place, except this time it's a fight to the death. This game has various regular and team-based deathmatch games, a base-attack mode, and even a *Robot Wars*-esque football game, where you have to collect a ball and fire it into the opposition's goal.

Altitude's controls are simple and intuitive. Use the arrow keys to move your plane about and accelerate/decelerate, while pressing F, D and S fire weapons of varying description.

Experience can be earned and levels can be gained, as is the case in every game nowadays. As you progress, new unlocks appear and various new planes appear for selection. Levelling up is relatively quick and it shouldn't take you too long at all to get the first couple of planes unlocked.

The core of the game, unless you prefer bots, is played online against



other humans, who'll generally be miles better than you. It doesn't seem to matter in this game, though, because you always have a feeling of "ah well, it's just a game" instead of the tongue-chewing rage of more serious titles.

The only flaws I can really point to are that *Altitude* has a simple premise and often such ideas have a short shelf life (though clearly not always).

Stalling can be frustrating in certain low-lying areas too, as you might not actually be able to escape, but these are minor niggles. It's a great little indie game, it's cheap and you really should play it.

David Brown

PCZONE

83

Nimble's Flying Circus

State of Play

We look at the changes made to games after their release...



THIS MONTH...

BATTLEFIELD HEROES

PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE battlefieldheroes.com PRICE Free-to-play

THE RECENTLY REVISED microtransaction pricing model of *Battlefield Heroes* reduces the cost of weapons, equipment and clothes in the shop meaning players get to power-up their character for much less actual money.

Sounds good on the surface, and surely no cause for alarm right? Unfortunately the inclusion of a stealth tax on the non-paying player, which increases the amount of time it takes to get the same items using in-game experience instead of cash, has upset a few people.

That gamers are up-in-arms about a price reduction rather than increase is

a unique situation. But calls for a rethink offering more parity between those paying and those who are purely playing for free are unlikely to appeal to EA who want to start making money out of *Battlefield Heroes*' sizeable user base.

There are very few entertainment sectors in the world offering something for nothing. The closest we get to free entertainment is watching terrestrial TV, but even then there's the licence fee. Of course you can opt not to pay, but that could feasibly land you in prison, which in fairness is much worse than the slight ignominy of being picked on by a man with a virtual über-sniper rifle atop a virtual lighthouse. There are inferior games than *BH* costing

a lot more for an initial purchase, with monthly subscription fees on top of that. The fact that there's as much as there is for free here is surprising in itself.

HEROIC STAND

The reality of the *Battlefield Heroes* situation is that it is still a free-to-play game – and a very good one.

The real issue here is not that EA has introduced this new pricing model; it's the perception that those with money gain way too much of an advantage. It's estimated that freeplayers have to slog through 60 rounds per day (about five hours of gaming) to earn enough Valour Points (VP) and Hero Points (HP) to unlock the same weapon as someone who forks out a few quid. Whilst it's true that earning VP and HP is a slow, painful

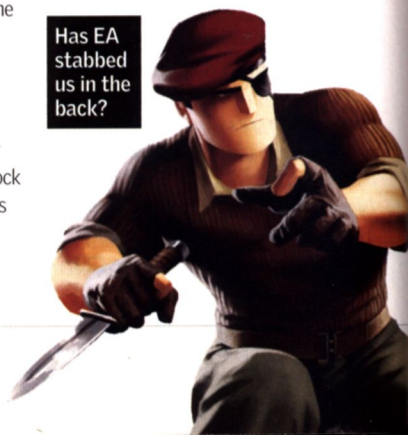
process, claims that this is driving the casual player out and turning the game into a hardcore-only shooter are untrue.

The matchmaking system means that both teams consist of evenly matched players. A rookie is unlikely to come across a high-level opponent armed with £30 worth of guns. The core mechanics of the gameplay ensure that whether you're at level one or level 20 you'll be having the

FACT

Battlefield Heroes spawn points are picked by the game to drop you in the nearest battle. So there's no waiting in the event of your death.

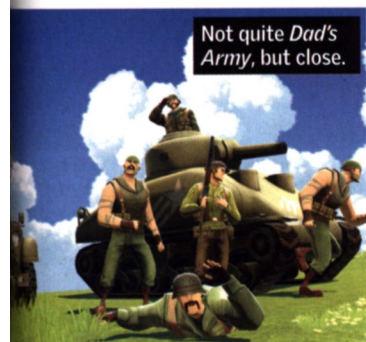
Has EA stabbed us in the back?





That plane will probably crash within seconds.

Not quite *Dad's Army*, but close.



same experience regardless of your weapon's power. True, lower level players may well come face-to-face with someone who's bought themselves a tasty shooter the moment they activated their account, that doesn't automatically make them a better player.

There's more to *BH* than just shooting guns: you have to anticipate where your foes will be hiding and understand the terrain. Like any map-based multiplayer game, success comes through learning the maps, not having the most powerful gun. Admittedly it doesn't hurt to know the maps and have a gun that can do a fair amount of damage. Ultimately though, there are probably more nuanced

"There are moments of classic *Battlefield* brilliance to be had"

71% – Jon 'Log' Blyth, PC ZONE #214

strategic aspects in *BH* learnt through experience than bought from a shop.

Those that have the cash to spend and believe that they need the best weapons to be victorious could actually be doing everyone else a favour. Their unquenchable thirst for superiority means others can keep playing for free.

CASH OR NO CASH?

There'll always be the kid down the arcade who keeps feeding the coin-op slot when the 'Continue?' screen appears. He's getting further than anyone else, getting more kills, but he's paying for the privilege. And he's also paying for the crowd to stick around so he can keep proving how good he is:

EA says that 3 million people have signed up to *Battlefield Heroes* and there's no doubt plenty are still playing for free. As long as they can see enemies falling by bullets they've fired then they're happy – it's not as if the bought-and-paid-for

brigade are invulnerable. The most celebrated badge of honour you can get as a Play4Free player is to take down a prize moneybags.

Whether you pay or don't pay is irrelevant. *Battlefield Heroes* still provides a well-balanced online experience. And, if we're honest about it, we all know this is just the start of a microtransaction revolution. This is EA's test model, a mere taste of what's to come and we need to get used to it fast. **PCZ**

VERDICT

A powerful weapon isn't guaranteed to bring you success, as this game is about getting into the right position, understanding the terrain and making the most of your gear. So, whether you pay or not, *Battlefield Heroes* is still worth a shot.

Keith Pullin

THE STORY SO FAR... **BATTLEFIELD HEROES**



MAY 2008

BH was put through closed beta by a selection of testers including hundreds who picked up keys at the Penny Arcade Expo.



JULY 2008

EA CEO John Riccitiello announced that *Battlefield Heroes* would be delayed until 2009 "to increase its focus on some of the social networking features".

FEBRUARY 2009

The second closed beta sign-up reached a 100,000 participants. If that wasn't enough, DICE sent out a further 50,000 beta keys.

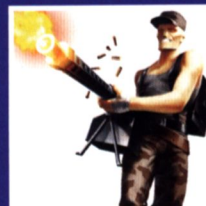
JUNE 2009

Battlefield Heroes became the first *Battlefield* game released under EA's 'Play 4 Free' brand.



NOVEMBER 2009

Price structure changed amidst claims it'd kill the game. But whining players still got a new map – Sunset Showdown.



DECEMBER 2009

Over 3 million sign-ups at the rate of 50,000 a week seems to suggest *BH* is still going strong.

Budget

Cheap and cheerful – that's the PC ZONE way

UFO: AFTERMATH

PUBLISHER 1C Publishing WEBSITE ufo-aftermath.com PRICE \$599 (£3.50)

IF CAST YOUR mind to last issue's Retro Zone, you will recall the two-page X-Com love-in that was *Back In The Day*: two pages all about a isometric turn-based strategy.

This game began as a tribute to the X-Com games made by Mythos Games – the X-Com franchise's creator. But the game's development stalled, until it was bought out and the task finished by ALTAR Interactive.



Global warming turned Africa into a big sandpit.

THIS MONTH PCZONE SAVED MONEY BY...

Steve stowed away on a ferry back to Ireland. **SAVING** £70



Richard took loads of DVDs during an Xmas visit to his parents. **SAVING** His sanity



David ate all the cake. **SAVING** £20 on lunches



UFO: Aftermath and *UFO: Enemy Unknown* similarities are striking – both mix strategic planning with tactical combat with various aliens; require you to research tech scavenged from aliens; and (obviously) are set during an alien invasion. The big difference is *Aftermath* starts after a successful invasion. It's your task to gather some of the few remaining humans and form a resistance force who will kick the aliens off the planet. (Like *War of the Worlds*; except with Tom Cruise fighting back, rather than running away.)

The gameplay in *Aftermath* also changed to use real-time tactical combat. While some of the tension from X-Com's turn-based battles games is lost, the aliens always outnumber and are much better equipped than your forces, so victory is never guaranteed.

Another element that was added to *Aftermath* was RPG-like levelling for your soldiers. This allows you to ensure squads have competent soldiers and specialists, rather than lucking into them (as with X-Com games). Unlike X-Com games there's no base-building – you can only use existing military facilities, which are discovered during the game.

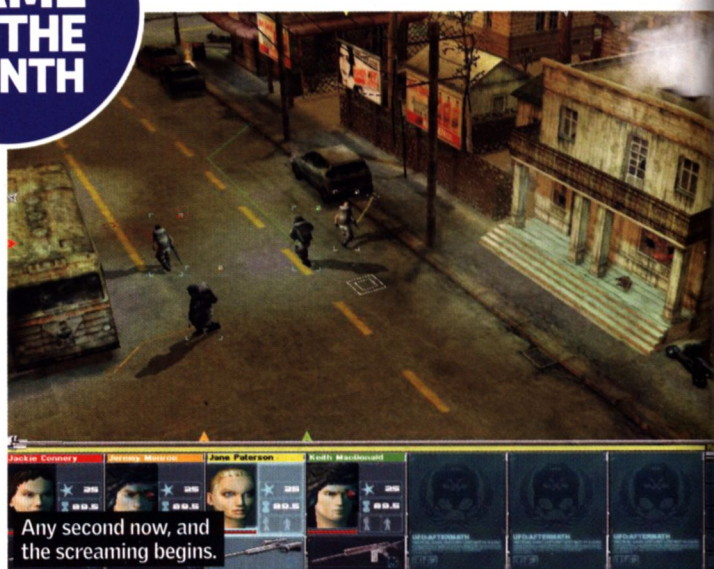


Aliens in the locker room: that's bad.

The Swiss Cheese alien: tasty on toast, but deadly.



BUDGET GAME OF THE MONTH



Any second now, and the screaming begins.

The main downsides to this game are the graphics – even for its time, *Aftermath* looked dated – and that the game starts slowly start (you begin with two civilians, including one incredibly annoying hillbilly).

While *Aftermath* is flawed, it's a damn good title. At least until the X-Com series gets a reboot. **RC**

PCZONE

71

A decent way to make do



Levelling: what X-Com desperately needed.

ADVENT RISING

PUBLISHER Majesco WEBSITE adventtrilogy.com PRICE \$5.99 (£3.50)

THIS WAS TO be the first game in an epic science-fiction trilogy, that got attention because it was by big-name sci-fi writer Orson Scott Card.

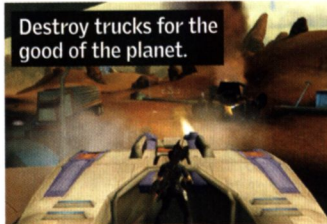
Yet this was a piece of spin, as Card just scripted dialogue and cutscenes based on a story by the game's creators. There were to a series of novels penned by Card as well, but after this game's lackluster sales, Majesco turned their backs on continuing the story.

Advent Rising is about Gideon Wyeth: a rookie pilot who's part of humanity's first encounter with aliens. (Because that's who you want on a job like that –

the new kid.) These aliens (sycophantic humanoid fish) warn you of the Seekers – 12ft lizards intent on saving the galaxy by killing every human in existence.

After this Wyeth starts fighting Seekers, is worshipped by the fishy aliens, and develops superpowers that are apparently innate in all homo sapiens. This evolution goes a long way to explain why Seekers hate humans, as to develop his powers Wyeth has to kill Seekers and collect power-ups.

That's the game: kill bad aliens, collect power-ups, run for a bit, kill aliens, collect power-ups, ad infinitum and nauseam.



This wouldn't be too bad, if the camera wasn't so disorientating. Each time you select an enemy, the camera spins to lock onto them. Not so bad in open areas, but in corridors it's bloody irritating.

If you get used to *Advent Rising's* camera the game can be fun. But it's tough to recommend this, especially as *Mass Effect* is available for a few quid more. **DB**

PCZONE
62

ASSASSIN'S CREED

PUBLISHER Focus Multimedia WEBSITE assassinscreed.ukubi.com PRICE £9.78

CLEVER FOCUS MULTIMEDIA.

With *Assassin's Creed II* seeping into the public consciousness through TV ads and posters being fired through people's living room windows, it's the perfect time to release the first *Assassin's Creed* game on a budget



label and con dozens of confused parents into buying the wrong thing and ruining Christmas for everybody. Of course, *Assassin's Creed II* isn't out on PC until next month, but the moment the sequel is released, is the moment that the original game will become totally worthless.

And if you've played the sequel on one of those console boxes, returning to the stilted mission structure and repetitive drudgery of *Assassin's Creed* is like watching an IMAX film through a toilet roll tube.



On the other hand, if you've never witnessed the spectacle of Altair's effortless parkour through impressive cityscapes, and are prepared to accept exactly how boring some of the missions will become, then dive into it like a big pile of conveniently positioned hay. If you haven't played it you won't get that. **SH**

PCZONE
70

AND THE REST...

The other cheap releases out now



SANITARIUM

PRICE \$9.99 (£6), Good Old Games
Far too short, but stunningly imaginative visuals and storyline make a good game.

67



BEYOND DIVINITY

PRICE \$9.99 (£6), Good Old Games
A sequel/spin-off to *Divine Divinity*. Monotonous clicking is relieved by a dramatic storyline.

80



MYST: MASTERPIECE EDITION

PRICE \$5.99 (£3.50), GOG
A classic for those who dislike action and have high IQs.

72

PCZONE TOP 5 BUDGET GAMES



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR

PRICE £10, White Label
The historical RTS game that set the standard for others to follow. Buy it, if only to try out the mods.



FAR CRY

PRICE £5, Sold Out
With *Far Cry 2* out it's time for the original to take the spotlight again. The second-best FPS ever made.



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

PRICE £5, Mastertronic
If RPG is your favourite genre, you could do a lot worse than this epic, sprawling classic.



PSYCHONAUTS

PRICE £10, Steam
You won't have more fun than this psychological platformer unless *Brütal Legend* appears on the PC.



SID MEIER'S PIRATES!

PRICE £5, Sold Out
That's all the genres covered, isn't it? RTS, FPS, RPG, platformer and pirate. Yep, that's really everything.

Buyer's Guide

Don't stop buying them until they're bought

PCZ TOP 5

PERFECT ACTORS FOR GAME CHARACTERS

- 1 KEANU REEVES**
Gordon Freeman: Keanu couldn't ruin this, as he'll never be seen.
- 2 ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER**
Duke Nukem: Arnie 30 years ago. Not Arnie now.
- 3 VIGGO MORTENSEN**
Niko Bellic: he'd make a good Serbian gangster.
- 4 COLIN FARRELL**
Geralt of Rivia: Typecast? Maybe.
- 5 MARK MEER**
Commander Shepard: he is Shepard already.



PCZ TOP 5

PERFECT ACTRESSES FOR GAME CHARACTERS

- 1 AMANDA DONOHUE**
SHODAN: Donohoe has a villainess' sexy/evil RP voice.
- 2 DAME JUDI DENCH**
Kreia: she'd be a great dark Jedi.
- 3 FREEMA AGYEMAN**
Alyx Vance: Agyeman can't act, but she looks like Alyx.
- 4 KATE WINSLET**
Cate Archer: she has the humour, and a '60s chick look.
- 5 JENNIFER HALE**
Commander Shepard: she is Shepard already.



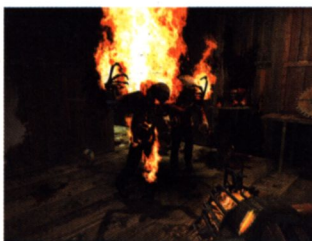
PCZ TOP 5

2009'S LOWEST SCORING GAMES

- 5 PAINKILLER: RESURRECTION**
19%, issue 210
- 4 GOBLITINS 4**
19% issue 208
- 3 X-BLADES**
19%, issue 207
- 2 TUNNEL RATS**
17%, issue 210
- 1 GREY'S ANATOMY**
9%, issue 209



FPS



HALF-LIFE 2 + EPISODES

PCZ Issues: 148 (97%), 170 (91%), 187 (82%)

Excelling in terms of action, storyline, emotion and ingenious set pieces, the continuing adventures of Gordon Freeman have yet to be equalled. Yes, a moderate amount of the action has faded through repetition by the time the episodes kick in, but with its Combine-defying freedom fighting, this is still the most finely crafted shooter experience ever released on PC. Gordon's alive, and long may he remain so.



LEFT 4 DEAD

PCZ Issue: 202 - 93%

The only thing the we like more than killing zombies is killing zombies as a team. And that's what *L4D* provides: a chance to scream with your buddies as you kill endless amounts of mindless and murderous plague victims.



TEAM FORTRESS 2

PCZ Issue: 187 - 93%

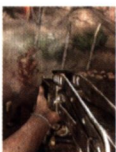
Beautifully balanced and engaging, Valve's update of the classic mod is a triumph, bringing together the best of online shooters and topping it all off with superb animation that rivals the best Pixar's films.



LEFT 4 DEAD 2

PCZ Issue: 214 - 94%

Basically, this is *Left 4 Dead* in the Deep South. Except this one has new modes, new Infected, new campaigns, as well as machetes and chainsaws for some serious slice and dice. Better than the original.



FAR CRY 2

PCZ Issue 201 - 90%

A triumph of non-linear gameplay, *Far Cry 2* offers an astounding chunk of Africa in which to play with guns, flames and explosions. The residents are too tenacious, but in a world this well-realised, you won't care.



CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE 2

PCZ Issue: 215 - 94%

Take all of the greatest action movies of all time, stick them together, and add some semi-manufactured controversies, and you have a massive hit. Still, it's an absolutely great shooter.



BIOSHOCK

PCZ Issue: 185 - 96%

This psion of *System Shock 2* will suck you right into its intricate, frightening, art deco world. A destroyed Utopia under the sea, terrifying characters and emergent combat make this an unmissable experience.

STRATEGY



EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR

PCZ Issue: 205 - 94%

Vast yet manageable, accessible yet hardcore. All four words and more describe the best *Total War* game money can currently buy. With the addition of dramatic sea battles and an extended global campaign map, there's simply nothing else with the same grand scope that remains as easy to get into. We feel that the only game that will topple this game from its perch as the best strategy game around will be the next game in the *Total War* series. It really is that good.



COMPANY OF HEROES

PCZ Issue: 173 - 93%

With this game Relic took the best bits from RTS games and left out the crap, creating a game that's accessible, taxing and exciting. And its expansions *Opposing Fronts* and *Tales of Valor* keep the action coming.



WORLD IN CONFLICT

PCZ Issue: 186 - 92%

A stunning RTS set during the Cold War, offering innovative online play, a solid single-player campaign that combines great gameplay and a good story, jaw-dropping graphics and the best nuclear blast you've seen.



CIVILIZATION IV

PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%

A *Buyer's Guide* without a *Civ* game would be a sorry place, and the latest version is the greatest yet. Now with added wormongering and diplomacy in the expansion packs *Warlords* and *Beyond the Sword*.



SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE

PCZ Issue 193 - 91%

This startling beauty of an RTS seemed to come from nowhere, and quickly converted us from indifferent idiots into grateful idiots by surprising us with accessible complexity.



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR

PCZ Issue: 175 - 91%

A blend of maniacal plotting on the strategic map and cheering with delight as your warriors collide spectacularly with your opponents' armies. Middle Ages war fun.



SUPREME COMMANDER

PCZ Issue: 179 - 88%

Huge battles of thousands of air, sea and land units? Giant stompy robots and a superb tactical map? One of the most original RTS titles around? Check, check and check.

ACTION/ADVENTURE



GRAND THEFT AUTO IV

PCZ Issue: 203 - 91%

We PC users have had to wait a while (OK - we had to wait a bloody age) before we could return to Liberty City with Niko Bellic, but the delay has been worth it. This version of *GTA4* adds graphics that are a cut above those seen on the consoles, expanded multiplayer modes, and an exclusive video editor, to Liberty City's free-roaming world and the sure-to-be-classic storyline of Bellic's American dream becoming an American nightmare.



MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

PCZ Issue: 136 - 93%

Payne is getting old, but it shows how to do bullet-time right. Noirish tone, a growling voice-over and remarkable gun action make that this is still a force to contend with.



GEARS OF WAR

PCZ Issue: 188 - 90%

GOW's tactical battles and toughness make you fear the bullets flying around you. With the climatic Brumak battle, the PC has the best version of this excellent shooter. Shame we'll never see *GOW2*.



FAHRENHEIT

PCZ Issue: 159 - 90%

Murder most foul, and you're the killer. *Fahrenheit* boasts a twisting, turning, brilliantly told story, featuring multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and several endings.



PSYCHONAUTS

PCZ Issue: 156 - 90%

Clever, witty, impeccably detailed and off its rocker - *Psychonauts* is proof that the anarchic edge of LucasArts hasn't completely left us. A slightly flawed game in some respects, but still a dazzling feat.



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

PCZ Issue: 138 - 89%

We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of Hillis is nothing short of storytelling magic. It's cheap now, so go out and buy it.



BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

PCZ Issue 213 - 89%

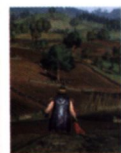
Proof that licensed superhero games don't have to suck, *Arkham Asylum*'s mix of action, RPG and stealth-em-up play makes it a near classic. The best *Batman* game we've ever seen.

MMOs



WORLD OF WARCRAFT

PCZ Issue: 152 - 95%
Blizzard's recreation of Azeroth as a living virtual world doesn't disappoint. While its graphics are dated, it's beautiful to watch, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.



THE LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE

PCZ Issue: 182 - 87%
A near-perfect recreation of Tolkien's tales, with solid combat and engaging plots, in a tasty MMO bundle. Meet Gandalf! Play as a hobbit or a spider! Middle-earth awaits...



WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING

PCZ Issue: 200 - 92%
Mythic slips Warhammer into their realm vs realm template. Even the most reluctant PvP'er will launch themselves into huge open warfare, and drop into temporary group quests.



GUILD WARS

PCZ Issue: 156 - 94%
How to make a gaming accessible to the masses. A lot of thought has been applied, and there are no subscription fees. Newbies can feel at home, thanks to a totally skills-based setup.



EVE ONLINE

PCZ Issue: 130 - 88%
Elite Online has been a long-held fantasy for old school gamers, and this space sim has come the closest yet to making it a reality. A slow pace belies the options on offer, from mining to trading to piracy.

SIMULATION



X3: REUNION

PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%
Finally, a space sim to better X2: The Threat, and it just happens to be the sequel. This is possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Oh, and it plays pretty well to boot. Why not get reunited with the X Universe?



IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES

PCZ Issue: 128 - 92%
While flight sims are getting rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None are more impressive than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Chocks away, comrade!



THE SIMS 3

PCZ Issue: 209 - 92%
The Sims 3 is like having your very own reality TV show in your PC, and just as addictive. Near complete freedom of gameplay lets you be a vicious diety, a benevolent dictator, or just a creepy voyeur.



MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X

PCZ Issue: 175 - 89%
The latest (and maybe final) in the Flight Simulator series is the biggest since Microsoft started using actual polygons. What's more, the visuals may just sear your eyeballs.



OPERATION FLASHPOINT: DRAGON RISING

PCZ Issue: 213 - 90%
Like its peer Arma II, OpFlash 2 aims to bring realistic warfare to your PC. But unlike its peer this game doesn't forget it's meant to be fun, not some kind of military training aid.

DRIVING/RACING



GTR2

PCZ Issue: 173 - 92%
Pick up this scarily realistic driving sim and race the car of your dreams. It comes with an improved driving model, new game modes and many other improvements. Guaranteed to make you feel like the Stig.



COLIN MCRAE: DIRT 2

PCZ Issue: 214 - 90%
The new rally game bearing the name of the deceased driver is a stunner. A successful mix of an arcade racer and simulator, it has most sumptuous graphics of any racer around. This sequel is going to be tough to beat.



BURNOUT PARADISE: THE ULTIMATE BOX

PCZ Issue: 205 - 89%
This game has set the standard for online arcade racers. Packs more speed than a drug dealer and more fun than slapping a bag full of Jonathan Rosses and Russell Brands.



RACE DRIVER: GRID

PCZ Issue: 195 - 88%
Codemasters moves the series from its historical simulation roots, strips off the TOCA and creates a movie-realistic game with plenty of play modes and global challenges. Kind of like Burnout, but with proper tracks.



NEED FOR SPEED: SHIFT

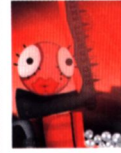
PCZ Issue: 213 - 84%
The Need For Speed series gets serious. Well, not too serious as the game is still weighed in the favour of fun over realism. But this is a polished release, and the best NFS around.

ODDBALL



SPORE

PCZ Issue: 199 - 95%
This is four charming mini-games and an excellent space strategy game, glued together with a bunch of creation kits. It's also a beautiful one-off that is so well-realised that you should experience it yourself.



WORLD OF GOO

PCZ Issue: 201 - 90%
A stroke of indie genius, World of Goo is a puzzler in which you erect fantastic goo-based structures across a myriad of unique and intriguing levels. Novel at every turn, this indie title is simply irresistible.



PORTAL

PCZ Issue: 187 - 89%
Ingenious and absurdly funny, Portal is a four-hour slice of perfect puzzles and discovery. Hurling yourself through floors and walls sounds odd, but modern games are rarely more delightful.



GARRY'S MOD

PCZ Issue: 179 - 88%
The God game-like Garry's Mod gives you the tools to create almost anything you can think of in the Source engine, from working robots to saucy ragdoll JPEGs. Fun and easy to use, try it out and see for yourself.



BRAID

PCZ Issue: 209 - 90%
Braid is extremely pretentious, but extremely well made, with time-bending twists that'll provide a challenge to new and veteran platformers. It also has a secret editor for making your own levels.

SPORT



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010

PCZ Issue: 214 - 88%
Every year sees another Football Manager appear to break up relationships across the country. But while FM2010's updates mean it still holds the top spot, Champ Man is closing in.



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2010

PCZ Issue: 214 - 85%
The football industry may ignore PES, but PES doesn't ignore PC users. This year's PES includes updates from the console release, something that FIFA 2010 can't claim.



NBA 2K10

PCZ Issue: 214 - 90%
Something of a niche product in the UK, this remains a fantastic sports game. Forcing you to use proper basketball tactics during matches that look like they're really on TV, NBA 2K10 proves it's the top of its league.



FOOTBALL MANAGER LIVE

PCZ Issue: 205 - 85%
All the joy of Football Manager with added MMO fun. Build your own team from scratch and develop your manager's skills, to let you take on other managers around the world.



CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2010

PCZ Issue: 214 - 80%
With a new 3D match engine, and new features like the set piece creator, Champ Man 2010 has jumped up in quality. While it still can't match FM2010's depth, it's far more accessible.

ROLE-PLAYING



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

PCZ Issue: 167 - 95%
Oblivion's sublime graphics, intuitive character-creation and massive freeform gameplay, put paid to the myth that you have to own a beard and live with your mum to enjoy RPGs.



FALLOUT 3

PCZ Issue: 201 - 91%
While it does play like Oblivion in a sci-fi skin, this is a great open-world that's just as entertaining if you just wander across Washington state than if you follow the plot. And DLCs are adding to its greatness.



DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS

PCZ Issue: 214 - 93%
By delivering an RPG that's at once realistic, brutal, heroic, sexy and immersive, BioWare has secured their position as masters of the RPG genre. We're already eager to see what they'll do with Dragon Age 2.



THE WITCHER

PCZ Issue: 188 - 88%
Adult and intelligent, the world of The Witcher is as fascinating as it is violent and corrupt. With an epic story that pushes you into moral dilemmas, this RPG came out of nowhere to revive an ailing genre.



DEUS EX

PCZ Issue: 93 - 94%
This is the benchmark in RPGs - if not gaming. A twisting plot, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama ensure Deus Ex remains the alpha male of the PC gaming world.

RICHARD'S PICK



THE WITCHER

PCZ Issue 188 - 88%
Being an old-time P&P RPGer - the kind which involves rolling funny shaped dice and talking to real-life people in person - I've always enjoyed CRPGs. But none have met my expectations since Baldur's Gate II. That is until The Witcher arrived. This game from then-unknown CD Projekt was plainly stunning: based on Andrzej Sapkowski's original reworkings of fairy tales and standard Tolkien tropes, this game featured intense tactical combat, drugs, sex, and - most importantly - a damn good story.

The Witcher's setting is a world where morality is a complex, shifting mass that lacks any clear definitions of good and evil. This is a world where an antihero is the good guy by default. By forcing you to choose between taking the side of medieval Nazis, literally inhuman terrorists, or staying out of the conflict and allowing a civil war to break out, The Witcher forces you to consider your actions and their effects. And not just on the wider world - each choice you're offered has a personal consequence for you in the game: help a woman out early in the game, and you get an ally later on; choose the wrong lover, and you make an enemy.

And boy, were there a lot of women. In various states of nakedness. As well as threesomes with eager nurses. Yes, The Witcher is a truly great game.

DAVID'S PICK



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010

PCZ Issue 214 - 88%
While doubters would decry it as being merely a spreadsheet or, if they're being kind, an "animated spreadsheet", they're clearing missing the point of why these games are so compelling to play. If you think of it being like an RPG then perhaps you'll come closer to understanding it. And if you factor in the fact your imagination has a lot to do with why you can enjoy something that, yes, does look like a swishier version of Excel. It's the emotional bond you form with your mental image of the players in your team that connects you to the game.

Like a good book, FM2010 goes beyond the mere dry presentation of facts and figures. Overanalyse the game and you miss the point, just like trying to interpret or explain why a classic book is saying what it says drains all the life from it. You might also want to think of it as a strategy game too, where your efforts are put into defeating an opponent using the information you have to hand. Essentially, you've got the most comprehensive football database in the world, licensed by Premiership teams, coupled with an increasingly lush visual aspect that belies its spreadsheet origins. Yes, you're just watching a load of stick men running around on the screen, but if you break any game down to that level, they become absurd. It's a great game and there's reason why so many love it.

INCOMING!

Want to know what's coming out? Then turn to page 18 for the full run-down.

THE

MOST FUN
YOU CAN

HAVE WITH
YOUR HANDS

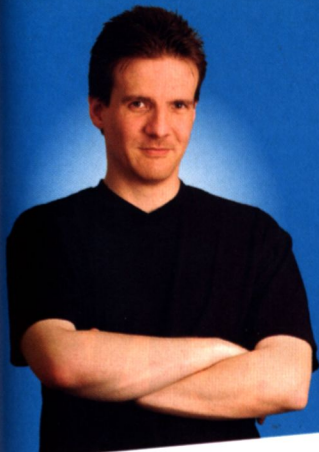
WITHOUT

GOING

BLIND

games
radar.

MORE KICKS PER CLICK



PCZONE

Hardware

Better gaming through technology

3G WOES

CRISIS! I'VE LOST my internet access. It's not because I've failed to pay the bill, or because my ISP has monitored indecorous behaviour at gentlemen's websites. No, it's because I've moved house.

They say that moving is as stressful as divorce or bereavement, and I think I know why: it's because there's always a gap of at three days between the line being disconnected at your previous address and being reconnected at the new one.

The worst thing about this is the lack of email. While emails hit my BlackBerry, my patience runs out long before any attachment larger than 0.5Kb downloads.

Remember all the marketing guff about 'next-gen' tech changing the world? How 3G would make our phones so fast our hats would spin?

As we know, it all turned out bollocks. The 200ms latency that seems inherent to all mobile data connections (even with low network load and high signal strength) makes internet on your phone completely pointless unless you live in the centre of a city or a large town.

Most of us don't. Our society has reached the point where internet ranks alongside phone lines, gas and electricity in terms of importance, and something needs to be done to make connections permanent to every home.

'Always on' should mean you can rely on it being there, even when you've just moved in.

Handwritten signature of Phil Wand

Phil Wand
Hardware editor

RECESSION BUSTER

Budget graphics card leaps ahead of the pack

SAPPHIRE'S NEW HD 5770 Vapor-X had its clock speeds set so high that it became the fastest Radeon in its class when launched. Paradoxically, it's also one of the quietest.

In 2007, SAPHIRE was the first card manufacturer to use Vapour Chamber Technology on its HD 3870 ATOMIC Edition card – the company has since used it several times, including in this card.

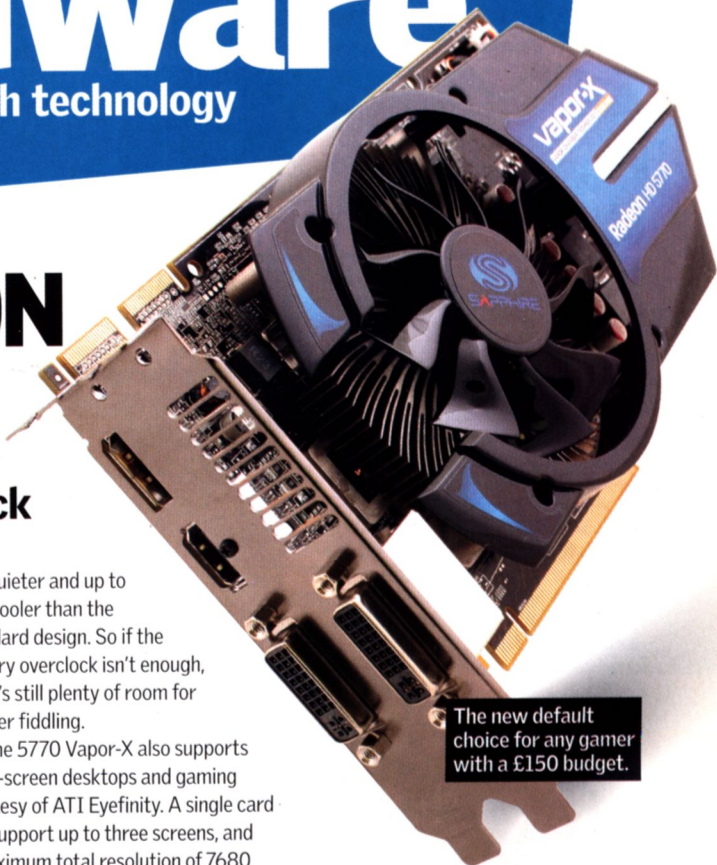
The DirectX 11-capable HD 5770 Vapor-X is the latest to wear the water cooled, heatpipe-derived design, and with it the SAPHIRE card manages to

run quieter and up to 9°C cooler than the standard design. So if the factory overclock isn't enough, there's still plenty of room for further fiddling.

The 5770 Vapor-X also supports multi-screen desktops and gaming courtesy of ATI Eyefinity. A single card can support up to three screens, and a maximum total resolution of 7680 x 1600.

What makes this 5770 so special is its price: available for under £140 online, the Vapor-X's combination of high performance and low noise makes

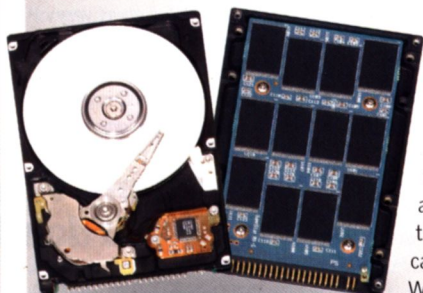
The new default choice for any gamer with a £150 budget.



CON SOLID NATION SSDs won't undercut HDDs

A CALIFORNIAN SEMICONDUCTOR firm have predicted that solid-state drives (SSDs) will remain more expensive than hard drives (HDDs) for the foreseeable future.

In answering "Why are SSDs still so expensive?" on their blog, San Diego-based AGIGA TECH explained that SSDs won't replace HDDs when the costs of manufacturing both have been falling at similar rates.



HDD and SSD: getting cheaper together.

In addition, the majority of users, given a choice between a 160GB HDD or a 32GB SSD for the same money, will choose capacity over speed every time. We live in a world of more and more music, pictures and videos. agigatech.com

NEWS ROUND-UP

INTEL WILL DISCONTINUE 80GB and 160GB X18-M and X25-M SSDs they launched in 2008. The second-gen models launched this year will march on. SSDs' 12-month product cycles can only increase existing buyer confusion. intel.com

ATI AND NVIDIA will both be showing their stereoscopic 3D Blu-ray playback systems at the Consumer Electronics Show (cesweb.org). The Blu-ray Disc Association have been looking to integrate 3D tech into their format for some time, and it'll be interesting to see if it works or just gives everyone a headache and motion sickness. blu-raydisc.com

IN 2010 STOCKHOLM and Oslo will get 4G mobile internet. It'll only be usable with a laptop and a USB dongle, but is planned to run at 100Mbit per sec. teliasonera.com

WARNING: THIS MONTH'S HARD WORDS

BY RICHARD COSGROVE

PROJECT NATAL: Microsoft's attempt to jump on the motion-control bandwagon started by Nintendo. Expect to see a perfectly working prototype soon, and a bug-ridden release in five year's time. **CLOUD GAMING:** Playing a game when the game itself isn't stored on your computer. Will require low latency, high-speed and reliable broadband. In other words – a great idea that will never work in the UK. **DIGITAL DOWNLOAD:** Describes the process of buying a game online. The opposite of 'analogue download', where someone sends you hundreds of sheets of paper covered with binary codes, that you have to manually type into your computer, in order to install the game.



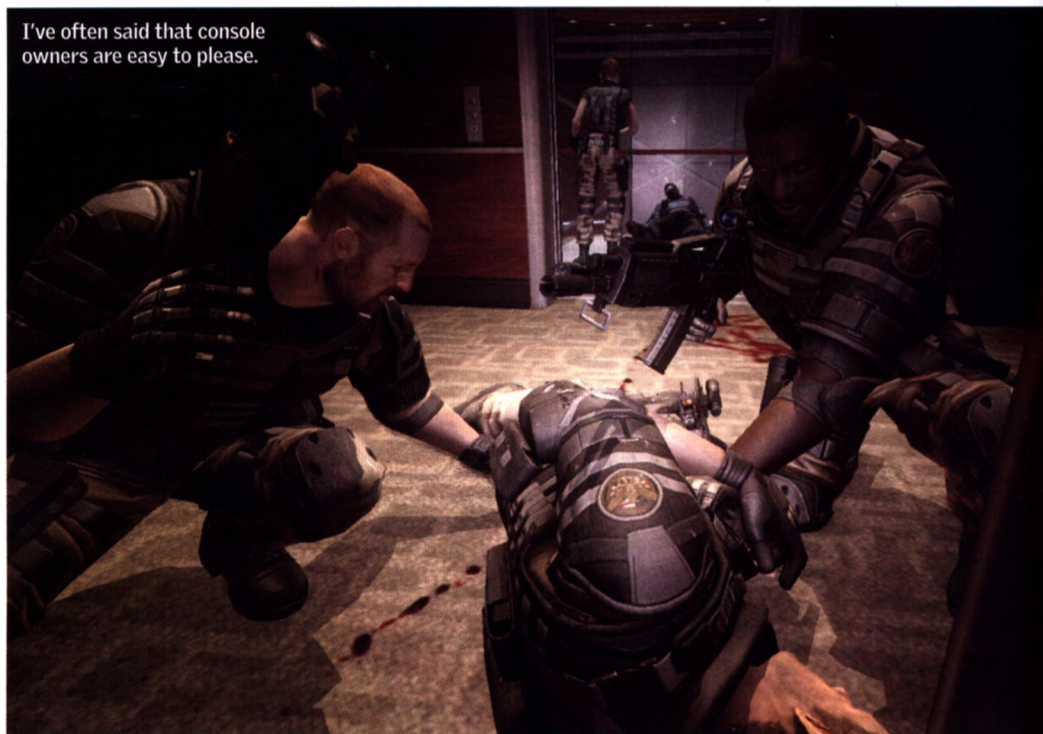
Dear Wandy

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. If it ain't working, don't panic...

PROBLEMS?

Mistook your wardrobe for the toilet again? Local shop stopped stocking your favourite blue-flavoured Pringles? Been playing *World of Warcraft* so long your partner's left you? We can't help with those setbacks (no, not even the Mighty Wandy), but we can solve all your hardware hassles. Wandy knows everything, and he's willing to help if you email him at: wandy@dearwandy.com, including as much information about your problem as you can and system specs where applicable.

I've often said that console owners are easy to please.



The CPU Martin Benton's mobo wouldn't support back in issue 214. Don't blame me!

DRIVER WATCH

GRAPHICS

| MANU | DESC | RELEASED |
|--------|-------------------|-----------|
| ATI | CATALYST 9.11 | 17 Nov 09 |
| NVIDIA | Force Ware 191.07 | 5 Oct 09 |

SOUND

| MANU | DESC | RELEASED |
|----------|--------------------------|-----------|
| Creative | X-Fi Beta 2.18.0004 | 30 Jul 08 |
| Creative | Creative Alchemy 1.20.04 | 01 Aug 08 |
| Creative | Audigy Beta 2.18.0001 | 17 Jul 08 |

Q GO EVAPORATE

Sometime ago your magazine reviewed *F.E.A.R. 2*. One thing your readers need to know is that you – and everyone else, including the DVD box – omits to mention that once you've bought the game, it's yours forever. You can't sell it or even give it away!

Steam apparently have a small clause in the initial agreement when you sign up meaning any CD/DVD key supplied with a game is linked to your account and can never be used by anyone else.

So forget giving it to a family member, friend or even to a charity bag – it is of no use to anyone. Once you played it the only place for it is the dustbin. It can't even be re-cycled.

How legal this is remains to be seen. After all, even Microsoft let you give or sell their operating systems to others once you have finished or upgraded them. As far as I am concerned *Steam* can evaporate, so like many others I'm closing my account with them!

Howard Angel

A *Steam* is a great idea. You get to purchase software that can be made available to you each time you sit down at any PC, and the fact it is free of the usual retail machinery means the prices are much lower.

So my sales pitch fell apart very quickly. *Steam* might be a great idea on paper, but many gamers tell me regularly that they feel as though they're unbuckling and bending over

dispose of a game you no longer play makes the whole platform feel too much like DRM by another name. Which, of course, it is.

But you have to remember that you're not buying the software, merely permission – a licence – to use it. If it's non-transferable then as licensee you need the permission of the licensor to transfer it. Valve are within their right and are certainly not alone in denying

"Fancy taking Valve to court? Go ahead. If you don't, someone will"

prior to making purchases. To give you an example, *Modern Warfare 2* is available through *Steam* now for £39.99, but through Amazon.co.uk for just £29.70 – that's even cheaper than the pre-order.

And while it's nice to think all the games you've bought will be waiting for you in magical online perpetuity, not being able to transfer or otherwise

you that permission, but it remains to be seen whether their tough-luck refund policy will stand up in a European court, given that computer games aren't exempt from our Distance Selling Regulations, and the *Steam* platform allows licences to be revoked.

Fancy taking Valve to court? Go ahead. If you don't, someone will sooner or later.

"Grumpy is more likely to mean right, the harsh truths of experience having eroded my veneer of cheerfulness"

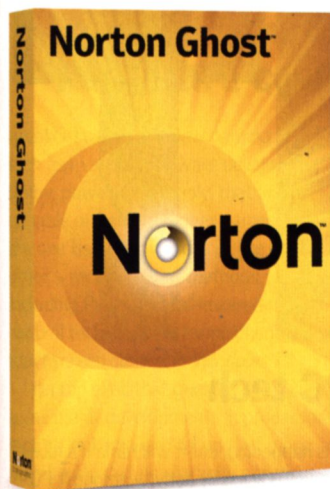
Q DON'T BOTHER

In issue 214, five readers asked you about upgrades. Your answers: "I'd not bother", "It's simply not worth it. In short, don't do anything", "I'd not waste any more time on it", "If I were you, I'd give up", and "The real answer to the original problem is not to upgrade the chip at all."

So you were uncharacteristically grumpy and negative this month (having a pallet-full of server racks might do that) or you have basically concluded that as prices of PCs have fallen over the years, the cost and hassle of upgrading is no longer worth it.

In which case, why don't you just print "Don't Bother" in large, friendly letters across the *Dear Wandy* double-page spread, and send your usual freelance invoice in to Future? It will get your message across, stop gamers from wasting their time and give you more time to sweet talk 25 server racks back into a warehouse.

Nicholas Lovell



Time for Ian Cairns to ditch Acronis and switch to Symantec?

A Well, they do say that the best advice is merely that which you least want to hear. The important thing is that every warning and recommendation I provide is good and correct.

I want to know if you think it's inappropriate or misleading, not whether you think I've been negative or bad-tempered. Grumpy doesn't mean wrong: in fact, grumpy is more likely to mean right, the harsh truths of experience having eroded my veneer of cheerfulness a lifetime back.

In short, positive-sounding advice to buy that quad core processor (that won't work with your motherboard), or to junk that perfectly good power supply (for an expensive, nifty-sounding new one with a rating you don't need), will provide retail therapy in these dark and dingy months but aren't really sensible courses of action.

In any case, I do believe you're being somewhat economical with the truth here. Two readers went away with shopping lists, one was already aware that what he was asking was improbable, and the other wondered if the system he was attempting to update was a "dead loss". I merely confirmed his, as it turned out, correct suspicions.

Q TRUE IMAGES

I have Acronis True Image Home which does not support dynamic drives. I didn't know I had a dynamic disk until I tried to back it up.

My C: drive is a basic disk and with a couple of clicks it's backed up. But my storage drive is apparently dynamic, and for this I have to select individual folders which is not major but a bit of a pain.

Is there anything I can do? I found an article telling me how to convert a basic disc into a dynamic one, but not the other way round so I guess I can't.

Ian Cairns

ALL ABOUT...

23 FIRMWARE

You know what hardware is, and you know what software does, but what about firmware? Where is it and how does it work?

If it needs power, there's a high chance it needs firmware to work. Your mobile phone has firmware. Your mouse does too, not to mention your keyboard and even your screen. Most components – your graphics card, hard disk and Blu-ray player – will have firmware too.

Next time you turn your machine on, have a longer look at your BIOS. This is your computer's firmware: it allows your PC to recognise and communicate with all its constituent parts, from the processor to the video output. Read the documentation that accompanied your last BIOS download and you'll appreciate just what firmware does.

These days, manufacturers have allowed end users to update the firmware of a multitude of devices in a process known as flashing. Even peripheral makers are allowing you to flash your mouse and keyboard to modify or introduce new behaviour.



Yank this chip and it'll all stop working.

A For those who don't know, a dynamic disk provides the ability to create single volumes that span multiple physical drives. They're most commonly found in commercial environments where files are scattered across multiple disks inside stripe sets, mirrors and RAID 5, and hence the reason storage may be 'dynamic' rather than 'basic'. Frankly though, I see no reason why a home user would pick the former over the latter.

And I'm annoyed at Acronis. Their corporate products have supported dynamic disks for some time now, so there's clearly no technical reason why home versions couldn't work the same way. Consumers have had to put up with at least one major True Image version release each year now, something that normally involves a redesign of the interface, rather than adding actual features, so it's about time they gave us something useful.

There are three ways around this. The first is to upgrade to True Image

Home 2010 and then get the accompanying Plus Pack which adds support for dynamic drives. Further reasons to be hacked off by Acronis: the Plus Pack will cost you £23.95.

The second way is to convert your dynamic disk into a basic one by deleting its entry in the disk manager and creating a replacement, but this is going to be a pain as it involves nuking all your files – and of course you can't run a backup prior to doing this because True Image won't let you.

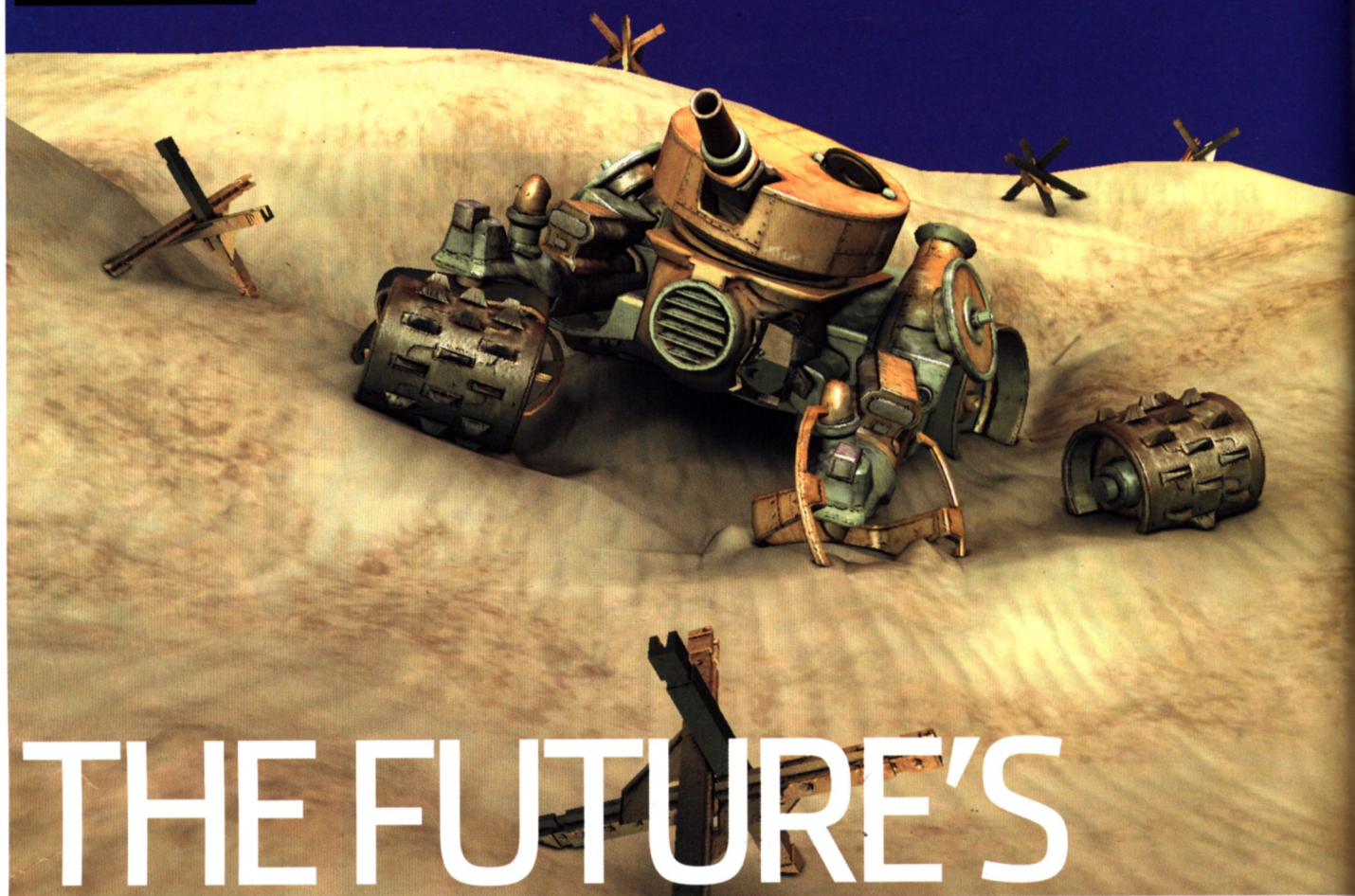
Now, there are utilities available such as Dynamic Disk Converter from dynamic-disk.com which do the task without loss of data, but they're the same price as the Plus Pack.

The third and final way is to ditch True Image completely and buy Norton Ghost, which has had support for dynamic disks since 2003, or to entice freeware alternatives, such as CloneZilla (clonezilla.org), to add the feature by making a donation to their authors. [PCZ](#)

FORUMS:
DIRECT FROM
DEARWANDY.COM

(wowaddict) My girlfriend bought me a Gigabyte GM-M8000 and a Qpad XT-R for an early Xmas pressie. Today I noticed the mouse wasn't tracking properly over the mat. Off the mat it's fine and it seems to only occur over the large black area in the middle. Anyone else had similar problems? (Wandy) I've lost count of the number of mouse mats that've made modern mousing worse than if you were to use the desk surface beneath them. My advice is always to use the plainest mat you can get – the only thing you want is a slight texture to the surface and a non-stick underneath. Anything else is frippery likely to make things worse.

DirectX 11's advanced tech promises smoother curves and subtly detailed models.



THE FUTURE'S



Adam Hartley takes a look at what 2010 has in store for PC tech

PCS RULED THE roost in 2009. While console gaming hit the brick wall of its own technical limitations, PC gaming technology just continued to get better, faster and cheaper as the year wore on. And now 2010 is upon us what we know is that the coming year is going to be a better for new PC computing and gaming tech.

"It's a big year for PC gaming with Windows 7 bringing massive improvements like DirectX 11 and

hardware costs still dropping," agrees Patrick Goss, editor of TechRadar.com. "It's about time the major players like NVIDIA, AMD, Intel, Microsoft and, of course, Valve managed to come up with some way to drag people away from the now ageing consoles and back to the PC as a primary gaming platform."

We've got ourselves excited about NVIDIA's new 3D-gaming goggles in recent issues, and Jane Douglas, editor of MSN's Tech and Gadgets channel agrees with us that "hardware makers

and publishers will keep plugging away with 3D gaming next year," but adds the important caveat, "until games themselves are designed around 3D experiences – until they require 3D viewing – it won't catch on."

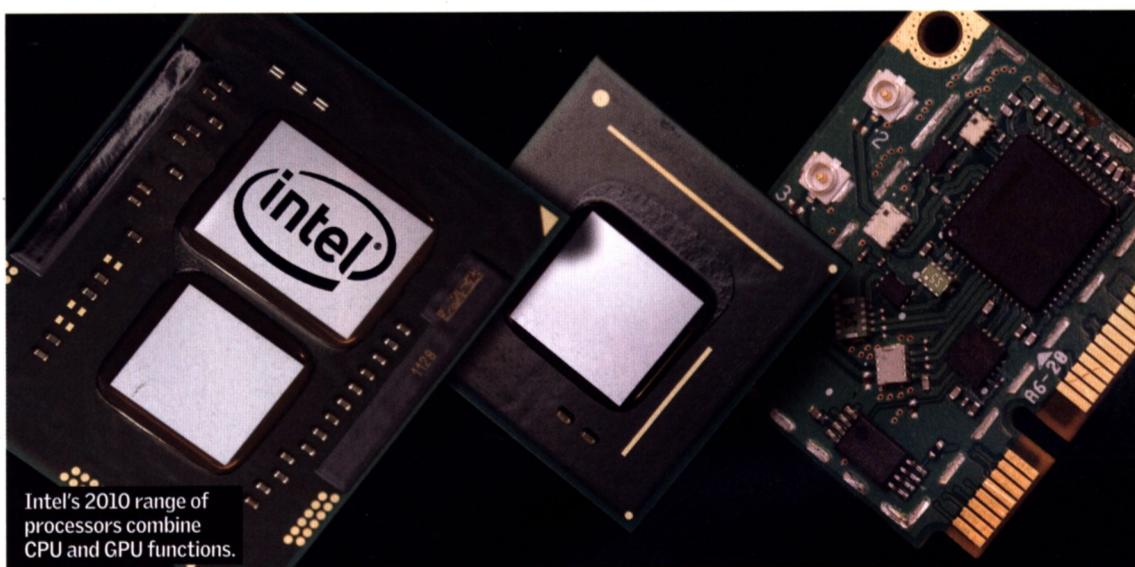
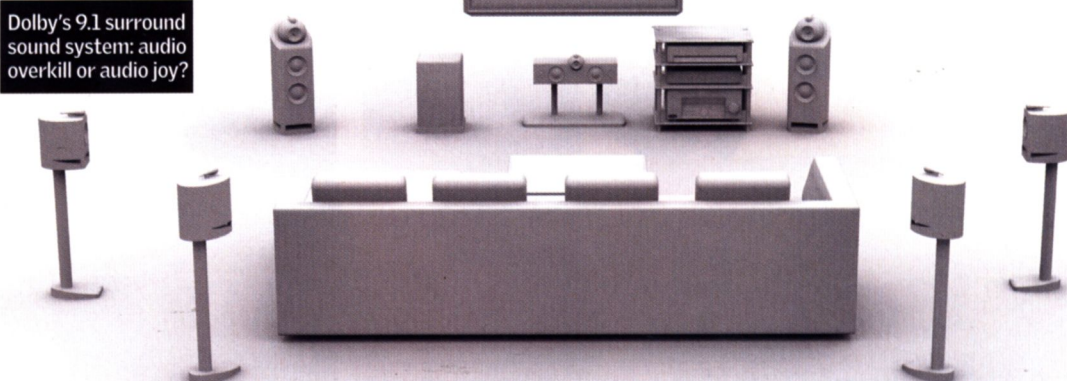
"If the 3D element can't open up new kinds of gameplay, it'll remain a gimmick, at least until 3D systems that don't need glasses and extra kit are commonplace."

However, let's not get too downhearted. Lots of very cool 3D stuff

is happening, but it will remain a niche and fairly costly activity amongst PC gamers in 2010.

Luckily there are a bunch of other new and emerging technologies that we equally look forward to playing on and with in the coming months, including (in no particular order) new tablet computers from the likes of Microsoft and Apple; new cloud gaming services such as OnLive (onlive.com) and Dave Perry's Gaikai (gaikai.com); that immense new 9.1 surround sound

Dolby's 9.1 surround sound system: audio overkill or audio joy?



Intel's 2010 range of processors combine CPU and GPU functions.

"It's a big year for PC gaming with hardware costs still dropping"

speaker system and new gaming audio tech from audio hardware developers* Dolby; powerful netbooks that are capable of running proper games and – the one issue that divides us like no other – tactile control methods, including Project Natal-inspired motion control tech and new forms of enhanced touchscreen control in *Windows 7*.

On top of all that gubbins, we have some major developments in processor tech to look forward to, and yet more ridiculously fast new graphics cards being promised from NVIDIA and ATI. As graphics are the meat and potatoes of PC gaming, let's start with that.

NEW CPU AND GPU

Intel are set to release Westmere, its 32 nanometer revision of the Nehalem microarchitecture seen in Core i7 desktop CPUs early in the year.

Essentially the Westmere will be the first PC processor that will combine the

central processing unit (CPU) and graphics processor unit (GPU) in one, single package.

At the affordable end of the scale, you'll see the dual-core Clarkdale Westmere CPUs sold under the Core i3 and Core i5 brands. Whereas at the silly-money end, if you want endless computing power then Intel's six-core Gulftown processor will be your chip of choice in 2010. This should be available at some point in the early summer.

Elsewhere, AMD don't look like they're going to be pushing as many boundaries in 2010, with their new Bulldozer core architecture and the CPU/GPU fusion chip (or Accelerated Processing Unit) not slated for arrival in our homes until later in 2011.

That said, the company aren't resting on their laurels and are set to release a new sub-£200 six-core chip

called Thuban. This will be a slightly sprightlier version of its Phenom II CPU which, at that price range, should be tempting for many gamers.

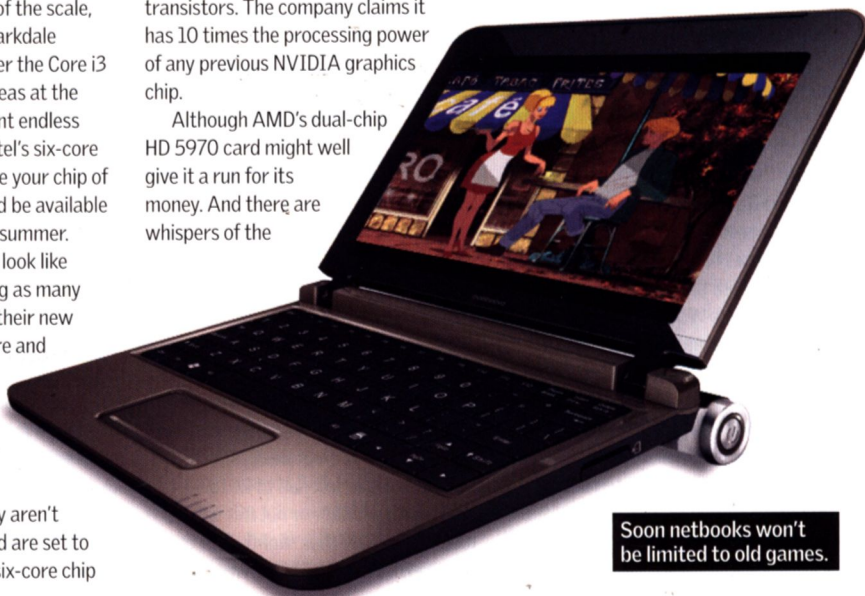
Graphics-wise, we have some equally appealing tech to whet our whistles. NVIDIA's Fermi packs in 3 billion transistors. The company claims it has 10 times the processing power of any previous NVIDIA graphics chip.

Although AMD's dual-chip HD 5970 card might well give it a run for its money. And there are whispers of the

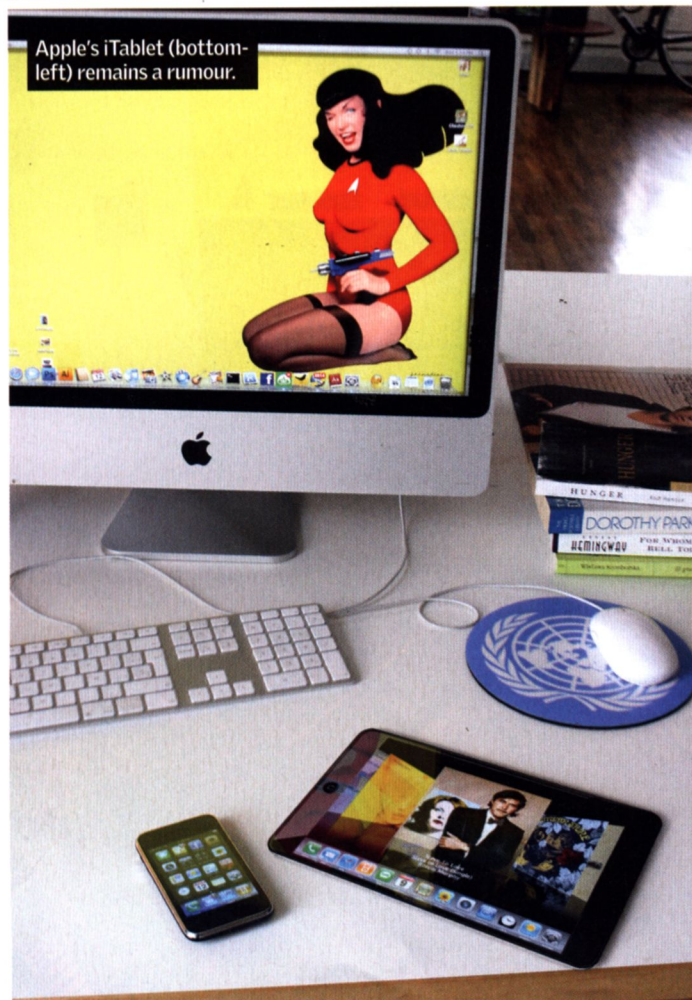
release of the new Radeon HD 6800 series later in the year.

GAMING NETBOOKS

The netbook craze continues unabated, with these cheeky little computers becoming the



Soon netbooks won't be limited to old games.



main growth-driver for the home computing market in 2009. Which basically means supermarkets sold a shed-load of them to non-techies and grannies last year. However, gaming on the netbook has been a purely casual affair up until this point, as their limited power means they're not powerful enough to run decent 3D games, so they're limited to running PopCap's latest releases.

Not all gamers have our gnat-like attention span deficit disorder though, with Edwin Evans-Thirlwell, editor of Video Games Daily (videogamesdaily.com) proudly boasting he often uses his bog-standard Acer netbook, "both for on-the-go work (image editing, Word documents, Internet browsing, Flash games) and light entertainment in the form of old strategy gems like *Dungeon Keeper 2* and *Ground Control*."

"At worst, netbooks can be slow, crash-prone entities with terrible ergonomics. At best they marry a smartphone's relative cheapness and compactness to the broader, more

flexible control setup and power of a laptop," he adds.

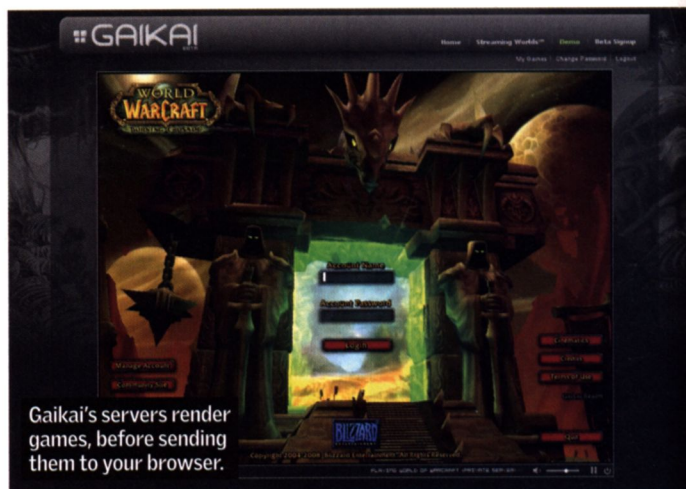
This is all well and good if you like old strategy and modern Flash games, but it's the prospect of beefier processing and graphics power in these mini-computers that is the most exciting prospect in 2010.

The second-gen Intel Atom processor (codenamed Pineview) will

"If the 3D element can't open up new kinds of gameplay, it'll stay a gimmick"

mean increasingly smaller, faster PCs with much-improved battery lives. But what is far more exciting is what NVIDIA's newly-announced Tegra 2 combined CPU/GPU for mobile devices is capable of. The graphics giant promises "roll-outs and deployments of tablet PCs, smartbooks, netbooks and MIDIs [mobile internet devices]," throughout the first half of 2010.

Though whether or not this will all mean little more than slightly improved movie viewing on the go, or whether it



will allow us to play fast 3D games on a netbook, still remains to be seen.

Google are expected to release a Chrome-powered netbook this year. This might be a low-cost alternative to the Next Big Thing, which is.

APPLE ITABLET

This piece of kit hasn't been announced yet, remaining firmly in the category of vapourware. But it's going to happen. We'll stick our neck out and say that we expect to see Apple announce their new tablet computer in February,

as the MacWorld convention in San Francisco is the traditional time for Apple to announce new products. Though whether the iTablet will see a commercial release before 2011 is anybody's guess at this point.

"I expect all kinds of hybrid products to emerge as manufacturers jockey to differentiate and make the right combo to create a new hit product," says display industry analyst Chris Chinnock, and adding that, "Apple have been rumoured to be working on a tablet for



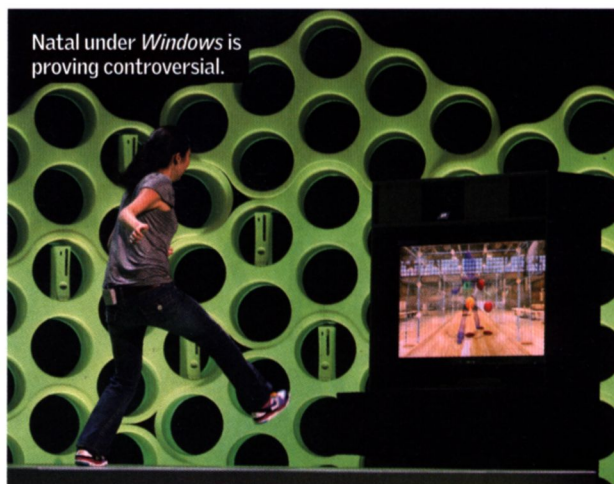
onLive®

some time, but I have no idea if they will finally pull the trigger on this."

Whether these pared-down keyboard-less Macs will interest gamers is open to question. Power gaming is pretty low on Apple's list of priorities for their new machine, yet the device's capability to change the way we listen to music – thanks to *iTunes*' new visual library format – and the way we buy and read books and magazines, just like the one you are holding now, could well be game-changing. Or they could well just end up being seen as Apple's eBook, that ends up being consigned to the big tech bin of failed products in a year or



OnLive would use a controller (above) and a set-top box (top).



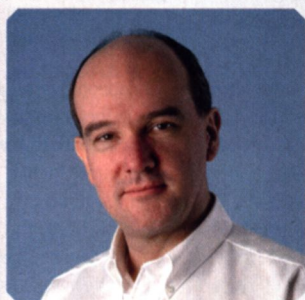
Natal under Windows is proving controversial.



It's doubtful OnLive will appear in 2010.



Steam could face competition with the cloud.



IS THE CLOUD THE FUTURE?

Is cloud gaming actually going to work?

"A number of factors still need to play out for a seamless gaming experience in the cloud. But the first the industry needs to come together to settle on a single standard," AMD's Richard Huddy told us.

At last year's CES, the chip giant unveiled its cloud gaming hand – new technology it hopes will "revolutionise the deployment, development and delivery of HD content" through the "AMD Fusion Render Cloud", a massively-parallel supercomputer.

Huddy thinks that the awesomely-named Fusion Render Cloud "will enable remote real-time rendering of film and visual effects graphics on an unprecedented scale."

If this is accurate, gamers with broadband could soon have instant access to the latest "visually intensive first-person shooters" on any old PC or mobile phone.

two's time. Even if the iTablet doesn't sell well, it'll likely influence plenty of designers who want in on Apple chic.

CLOUD GAMING

'Cloud gaming' was the buzzword and the darling of 2009's Game Developers Conference in San Francisco. But the hype surrounding services, such as OnLive and Gaikai, subsided through the summer as hard, techie questions about just how feasible server-side gaming is going to be began to be asked.

Veteran British games journalist Steve Boxer told us that he is pretty sure that "2010 will be all about cloud and browser gaming. As long as publishers compete to push the technical boundaries of what can be done without resorting to *Steam*-style downloads," though he adds a slight word of caution: "It will be a damp squib if it just brings about an even soupier morass of casual games."

Competing services that offer a mixture of the instant-on gaming and *Steam*-style download model, such as new offerings by the likes of Awomo (awomo.com) are indicative of the way the market is going. PC gamers want

their games delivered digitally, but they want them delivered quickly. And they will steadfastly refuse to play on any so-called cloud gaming service if there is the slightest hint of lag.

Awomo's marketing director Tim Ponting told us last year that they "the arguments have raged either way for months regarding video compression technologies, bandwidth, server farms the size of Alaska and the temperature of the sun. But as is the nature of the beast, I think gaming in the cloud's wild boar is latency. Unavoidably."

Instead Awomo intends for their new service, which is in beta right now, "To be your digital library for games." Ponting claims, "We have hundreds of games signed for the retail phase already. The intention is to offer the latest, greatest titles, alongside those hard-to-find classics that retailers just don't have the shelf space to stock. We're beginning to see increased awareness of the importance of downloads among all the majors."

Games analyst Nick Parker is a little less sanguine, admitting that while the future of games distribution is definitely digital "the 'iTunes moment' for games

will not occur in 2010". So cloud gaming may be a long term solution for digital distribution, and the type of gaming experience will shorten to bite-sized chunks rather than entire immersive core games.

MOTION CONTROL

This is the one that seems to generate the most amount of disagreements between PC gamers right now. On the one hand, there are vocal supporters of bringing Natal-style motion control to the PC, with Steve Boxer arguing that it "could finally make keyboard-unfriendly genres like driving games attractive on the PC, and bring Wii-style gaming to the most prosaic of platforms – plus it has all sorts of implications for social networking and avatar interaction."

Elsewhere, there are developers that visibly wince at the mere mention of introducing more tactile methods of control into the PC gaming experience.

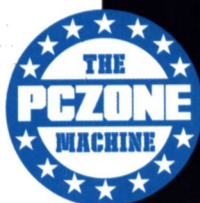
Alex Amsel, of indie game developer and distributor Tuna (tunasnax.com), seems to sum up that particular school of thought most eloquently telling us that motion control for PC gaming is a "load of bollocks". **PCZ**

PICKING THE PC ZONE REVIEW PC

We have two basic choices when picking out a new PC to test games on: go to the extreme high-end and get a PC resembling HAL's big brother, or go believably high-end and get a PC that's powerful, but is one that most people can realistically afford. That's why we decided to go with the X8i-Ci7.

X-WORKS X8I-CI7 NVIDIA EDITION

PRICE £1,280 MANUFACTURER X-Works WEBSITE xworksinteractive.com



The new PC ZONE PC.
We're very happy with it.

THE X8I-CI7 IS a solid machine that can handle anything you could throw at it gaming-wise. Which is precisely why we snatched it up as our new top-end reviews PC. As this PC is solely for us to play games on, that's where our tests focused.

The good news is that the X81 passed our stress tests with flying colours. *Far Cry 2*'s benchmarks never fell below 46fps at Ultra High settings and 8x anti-aliasing on, while it only struggled with *World in Conflict*'s when its benchmarking utility ran at 16x anti-aliasing. Only when the PC let itself down with *Crysis* were we disappointed with the X81's performance, as the Very High settings and 16x anti-aliasing produced less than favourable results during benchmarking. That said, the game was never unplayable, but it dipped too far below 30fps for comfort.

Using Futuremark's *3DMark* and *PCMark* testing suites produced above-average results too. A score of 14,596 in

3DMark was achieved, while *PCMark* brought a total of 6,523 to the table. These aren't the highest we've seen, but they're respectable nonetheless.

What should be kept in mind is that these results were achieved without any overclocking. We've no doubt there's more power to be wrung out of this system, especially with the Cooler Master Silent Pro inside the Antec P183 case keeping things chilly.

"This is a damn good machine, that will last anyone a good few years"

Speaking of, the case looks great. Taking the PC out of its box felt like we were watching *2001*'s monolith rise in front of us. And it's not just a looker, being littered with air vents, fitted with a pair of 120mm fans (top and rear), front-mounted eSATA and USB 2.0 sockets, and 11 drive bays. And it's even got soundproofed panels.

Combined with the Cooler Master Silent Pro installed by Xworks, this means this gaming PC runs noiselessly. The only irritant with the P183 is that

the power switch is partially covered by the case's swing-out front panel.

The motherboard is also a good pick. The MSI X58 E-PRO is a reasonably priced Core i7 board, that can take up to 24GB of 1,600MHz tri-channel RAM, and is compatible with NVIDIA SLI and

ATI CrossFireX multi-GPU protocols. But really for many gamers the biggest interest lies with MSI's *GreenPower* utility, and the mobo's OC Jumper and Easy OC switches.

GreenPower is a *Windows* utility that can over- and underclock just about all of the board's features, giving you a performance boost without the need to dive into the BIOS. Meanwhile the OC Jumper and Easy OC gives one-flick hardware-based overclocking. MSI say using these switches gives an immediate 5%-30% boost to a PC's speed.

Altogether we're very pleased with our new acquisition, but there are areas where it can be improved.

To start with swapping the GTX 285 for a GTX 295 would deliver a big jump in frame rates. Unfortunately this PC arrived a few weeks before ATI's new

5-series of DirectX 11 Radeons were launched. Now swapping the GeForce GTX 285 for a Radeon HD 5870 would deliver a speed boost to games far in excess of a GTX 295 – even when running DirectX 10 games. Still, the GTX 285 is a very good card, which has a good year or two left of life before it's completely outclassed.

Another minor bugbear is that the machine is supplied with a 32-bit *Vista*. A 64-bit OS would allow the PC to utilise all 6GB of system RAM, alongside the 1GB on the GTX 285. Useful, but in practical terms 3GB of system RAM is plenty for gaming. Finally, a solid-state boot drive would be a luxury that would deliver another performance boost.

Yet really that's all nit hunting, as the X8i-Ci7 is a damn good gaming PC as it stands. This PC could last you a few years, without needing any major changes or upgrades. **DB**

SPECIFICATION

| | |
|-------------|-----------------------------|
| CPU | 2.67GHz Core i7 920 |
| MOTHERBOARD | MSI X58 PRO-E |
| GPU | 1GB NVIDIA GeForce GTX 285 |
| RAM | 6GB 1333MHz DDR3 |
| STORAGE | 600GB SATA2 7,200rpm HDD |
| OS | Vista (32-bit) |

BENCHMARKS

| | |
|-------------------|----|
| FPS @ 1280 X 1024 | |
| FAR CRY 2 | 56 |
| WORLD IN CONFLICT | 44 |
| CRYSIS | 21 |

PCZONE

81

PC ZONE like. A lot

KINGSTON SSDNOW 40GB

PRICE £80 MANUFACTURER Kingston
WEBSITE kingston.com/ukroot

THE PRICES OF the first solid state drives were staggeringly high, but their performance made them a good buy. Until they failed wholesale. The next generation of SSDs fixed those issues, but bugs – like gradual slow downs and stuttering – still occur now.

These are mainly down to controller and firmware issues. Between the drives' manufacturers correcting these, and Windows 7's built-in TRIM command enabling SSDs to write over deleted data, rather than ignoring those areas in its flash memory, these problems are being solved. And none gripped the SSDNow during our tests. What was worth noting was the

absence of stuttering (a quick transfer followed by no activity, then more quick transfers), a common fault with SSDs.

This SSD's peak read and write times don't par with other high-capacity SSDs (like OCZ's Agility 120GB) though. However, the 4K 64-thread random writes results – the sort of small disk accessing that occurs constantly in today's systems – are impressive: at 18.1MBps the SSDNow is almost twice as quick as the Agility (9.8MBps).

While the SSDNow is a good performer, 40GB of storage isn't much. It's just enough to hold Windows and a few important apps.

But the SSDNow can't be written off. When a pair are set in RAID 0 their performance skyrockets: 4K 64-thread tests hit 48.7MBps, write speeds nearly double (46MBps to 89MBps), and read speeds more than double (184MBps to 391MBps). So using a pair of RAIDed SSDNows as a 80GB boot drive is a real winner. **DJ**

SPECIFICATION

| | |
|---------------------------|----------|
| CAPACITY | 40GB |
| INTERFACE | SATA II |
| MAX SEQUENTIAL WRITE | 46MBps |
| MAX SEQUENTIAL READ | 184MBps |
| 4K 64-THREAD RANDOM WRITE | 18.1MBps |



RAIDed, the SSDNow makes an excellent boot drive.

PCZONE
92

CAVIAR BLACK 2TB

PRICE £205 MANUFACTURER Caviar WEBSITE wdc.com/en

THIS HDD HAS four 500GB platters, each with two heads, in a regular 3.5in case. Caviar's fitting 2TB of data into this package isn't the only thing to be praised.

The heads impress by themselves: one finds the rough location of data, and the other provides an accurate pick-up. With the platters running at 7,200rpm, the Black hits remarkable read speeds of 115MBps in burst mode. Added to this, the heads don't touch their platters, which should give this HDD a long life.

The only problem with this drive is that it's too expensive. If you want 2TB of storage, you can pick up a two 1TB drives from Hitachi and Samsung for about £55 each, and RAID them for contiguous space. Add a third and you'll be able to make a RAID-5 array

for added security, and still have money left over. Or you can get a pair of 1TB drives, and a Kingston 40GB SSD, for the perfect price/performance combo.

So from a financial perspective, this drive doesn't make sense. Unless you're planning to build a RAID farm; your PC's case isn't able to fit two more 3.5in HDDs in it; or your motherboard can't RAID HDDs, you can safely give the Black a miss. **AD**

SPECIFICATION

| | |
|--------------------|--------------|
| CAPACITY | 2TB |
| INTERFACE | SATA (3Gbps) |
| AVERAGE READ SPEED | 115 MBps |
| VISTA START-UP | 80sec |
| PORTAL START-UP | 45sec |



Twice the capacity as a 1TB HDD, at quadruple the price.

PCZONE
72

REMEMBER:
AN OFFLINE PC
IS THE ONLY
TRULY SAFE PC

If you want to stay safe from the dangers of viruses, malware and spyware, but you can't be bothered with installing firewalls and other prophylactic utilities on your PC, there's an easier way of staying safe: never go on the internet. Ever. At all. Not once. Nix. Nada. Uh-uh.

Hardware Buyer

This is our favourite PC gear – both expensive and cheap

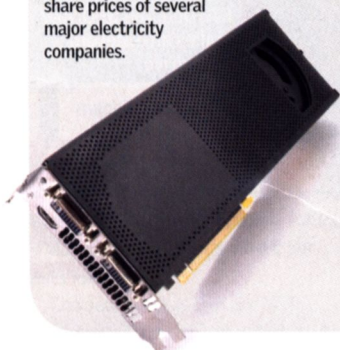
LOADED?

GRAPHICS

ZOTAC GEFORCE GTX 295

PRICE £436
zotac.com

The current king of the hill is this giant dual-GPU board from NVIDIA. That ridiculously large heatsink covers two 280 chips running side-by-side. And it's not just faster than AMD's 4870X2 (its nearest rival), but it's also a lot more energy efficient. Good news, as the 4870X2 is currently propping up the share prices of several major electricity companies.



PROCESSOR

INTEL CORE I7 965

PRICE £839
intel.com



Intel's latest processing powerhouse doesn't just have four cores with which to throw your games around, it also support hyperthreading for running even more simultaneous processes without affecting framerates. The upshot: there's not a game in the world that this will struggle with.

SCREEN

NEC 24WMGX3

PRICE £529
onec.com



If we had the money we'd fritter it on this incredible 27in screen from NEC. Picture quality is simply unrivalled, and it's got so many input options it's the subject of at least three web fetish sites. Size queens will always go for something larger, and that would be lavishly decadent too.

MOTHERBOARD

ASUS RAMPAGE II EXTREME

PRICE £321
asus.com

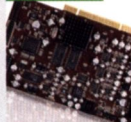


This Core i7-friendly board sports the X58 Intel chipset and everything else you can imagine. It's the deluxe department store of motherboard design, hawking bespoke capacitor design and expertly tuned performance pathways, to the sleazy suburban joys of three-way SLI.

SOUNDCARD

AUZENTECH X-FI PRELUDE 7.1

PRICE £144
auzentech.com



Take a top-of-the-range Creative X-Fi audio chip and surround it with components of such a high grade they're spoken of only in hushed tones by those in the know, and then add Dolby Digital Live – you'd have a pretty cool sound card, right? Actually, you'd end up with this one.

HDD

SEAGATE BARRACUDA 7200.11

PRICE £99
seagate.com



If we're talking money no object, then we'd couple this with a solid-state drive from Samsung for maximum performance and storage, but if our loaded rig was limited to one hard disk, it would be this one. A huge 1.3TB of storage and a performance unmatched by any other vanilla HDD.

SPEAKERS

LOGITECH Z-5500

PRICE £195
logitech.co.uk



The price has dropped below £200 and these speakers are simply the best we've ever tested. The soundtracks from both games and movies ravish your ears, and you'll soon find yourself dusting off your old CDs just so you can sit in the middle of the sound and revel in it.

SKINT?

GRAPHICS

SAPPHIRE HD4850

PRICE £120
sapphiretech.com

This is the card that had arch-rival NVIDIA slashing prices in an effort to be competitive. Just £120 buys you a mainstream monster with performance that matches a GeForce 9800 GTX and snaps at the heels of the new N280GTX. Put the magazine down and buy one.

PROCESSOR

INTEL CORE 2 DUO E2180

PRICE £44
intel.com



At the budget end of things, it's a tough choice between the E2180, E4500 and E8200 processors from Intel. It's not surprising that things get faster the more you pay, but the E2180 here is a flexible engine that's great for gentle gaming or an overclocking frenzy.

MOTHERBOARD

ASROCK CONROEXFIRE-ESATA2

PRICE £60
asrock.com



Paired with an E6300, this ASRock motherboard can wring high-end performance from a budget rig. It features a 1066/800/533MHz FSB, SATA II with RAID, 7.1 HD audio onboard, CrossFire support, Gigabit LAN and ASRock's easy overclocking features.

HDD

WESTERN DIGITAL CAVIAR 1600AAJS

PRICE £30
wdc.com



A 160GB hard drive, like this SATA 2 model, remains more than enough for the casual gamer to do a spot of casual gaming. A few good titles, Steam, a couple of thousand music files and the odd porn flick still leaves plenty of room for Windows to manoeuvre.

SCREEN

VIEWSONIC VA903M

PRICE £118
viewsoniceurope.com



The VA903m is a better bet than any of the similarly-priced widescreen variants as there are more pixels on its 19in screen: its 1280 x 1024 pixel panel offers greater depth than the standard 1440 x 900 panels of its peers, although it can't handle native widescreen resolutions.

SOUNDCARD

CREATIVE LABS SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY 2 VALUE

PRICE £20
uk.europe.creative.com



The cheap Audigy card features EAX 4.0 and Dolby Digital EX support. This card makes an awful lot of sense for casual gamers, as there's little point throwing half a mortgage payment at your soundcard, unless you're an audiophile, or you want your PC to act as a top-class music system.

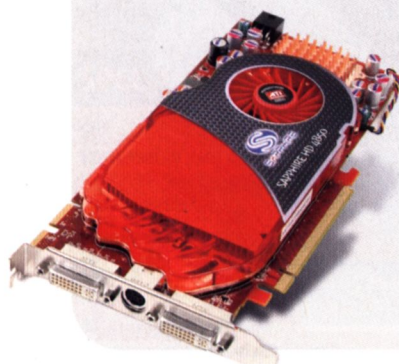
SPEAKERS

LOGITECH X-530

PRICE £55
logitech.co.uk



Logitech's X-530s have the edge on quality and are available just about everywhere. This Swiss-designed 70W, 5.1 surround sound system offers Logitech build quality with superb sound in games, movies and music. And their value can't be beat, giving sound quality above their price bracket.



Nintendo®

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

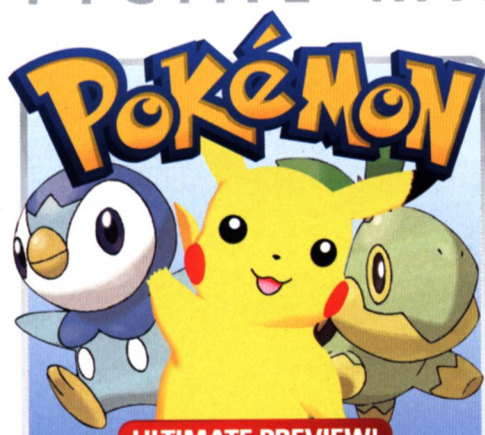
FREE!
Sonic
& Sega
stickers



START YOUR ENGINES!

SONIC & SEGA ALL STARS RACING

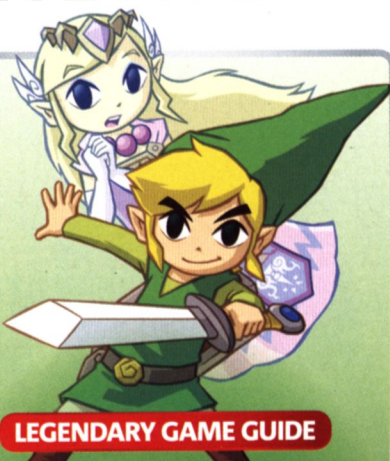
Buckle up for Sega's new racer!



ULTIMATE PREVIEW!

POKÉMON GOLD & SILVER

The definitive Pokémon game?



LEGENDARY GAME GUIDE

ZELDA: SPIRIT TRACKS

Master Link's latest adventure!

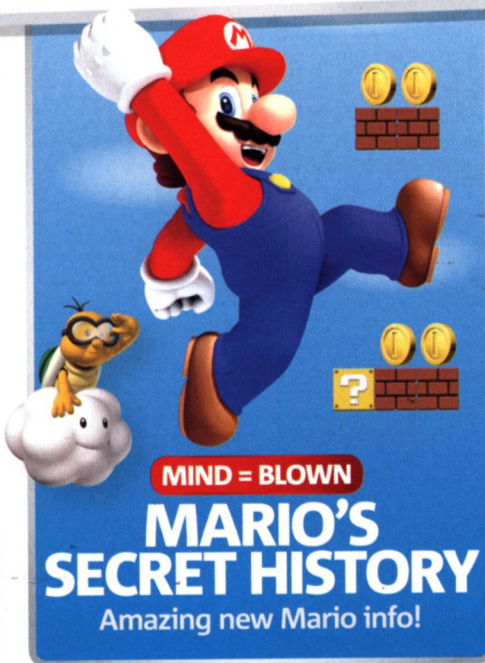
FREE 10 GREAT POSTERS



SHORYUKEN!

BEST BEAT 'EM UP EVER?

Tatsunoko Vs Capcom rated!



MIND = BLOWN

MARIO'S SECRET HISTORY

Amazing new Mario info!



SPELLBINDING!

LEGO HARRY POTTER

World's first hands-on

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PCZONE

Freeplay

For the man who has nothing

BAH, HUMBUG

GOD, I HATE Christmas. Sorry, that should be Xmas as I'm a big old atheist who doesn't buy any of this religious stuff. Religion has no place in this column, just as facts have no place in the Australian ratings system.

That winter festival discussed above makes our jobs harder. We had to produce the same results in half the time we usually do. And as every good game has already come out we were left with the slurry that oozed out between the release date cracks. Still, there's a silver lining to every dark, rain-belching cloud: that's free gaming.

Yes, another bumper collection of things you don't have to pay for approaches, with some crackers to load up as a middle-fingered salute to all the publishers who scorn us with their holiday sales schedules. They might have their *Call of Duties* coming out months before present time, but we have our dignity and *Onslaught of the Electric Zombies*. I lost more time on that game than on any other this month, which says a lot about the quality of the stuff we had in to review.

That's definitely one to check out then, but there are also good mods to try if you're in the mood for some more leftfield gaming. It'd be nice if some people actually started playing them, because at the moment things are a bit bleak for the low-profile mods. Just think about how different the PC gaming scene would have been if mods like *Counter-Strike* had gone unsupported.

Just think about the potential for any one of these mods to change the PC gaming scene and give them a go. You have the power, people. A bit.

David Brown
Staff writer



WAR ENSEMBLE

Team Fortress 2 continues to capture the hearts and minds of all PC gamers

WEBSITE teamfortress.com

THOSE CHEEKY RASCALS at Valve can't seem to do any wrong. Well, they can if you didn't like the whole *Left 4 Dead 2* thing. Or that *Episode 3* still isn't here. But when it comes to *Team Fortress 2*, Valve just keep rolling out the love wagon for the fans, this time loading it up with Soldier and Demoman-related goodness. And, again, they've put this all together with their customary style and panache, while also revealing what the Announcer actually looks like.

The premise behind the new update is that the Announcer is made aware that the Soldier and the Demoman have become firm friends, rather than bitter enemies locked together in endless combat. Despairing at this ghastly behaviour, she decides to put a stop to it. Enough of all this business though, what will you actually be getting in this *War Update*, as this free expansion is so delightfully known?

First of all, you've got the usual raft of new regular stuff, like maps and weapons, but let's examine one of them in a bit more detail.

The Soldier gets a new rocket launcher for those who've "mastered the art of shooting their targets instead of vaguely near them." Good news for those who love accuracy

struggle, could we? It was where every single death inflicted upon one class by the other was logged by Valve. The Soldiers won out, earning them a new item – Gunboats – which absorb damage from a rocket jump.

Valve have also released two new maps: Gorge (a map with two control points for quick play) and Doublecross,

"Watch out, leaping Scouts, your days are numbered"

then, at least. This new weapon has a 70% smaller blast radius than the regular rocket launcher, but it also has projectiles that fly 80% faster, plus do 25% more damage if they hit. Also, if you manage to pick someone off while they're in mid-air you get automatic mini-crits as well. Watch out, leaping Scouts, your days are numbered.

There's more, though. We couldn't forget about the Soldier vs Demoman

which has a bridge that's ideal for knocking opponents off.

Oh, but my, there's more. There's going to be a crafting system in the game, involving all the duplicate hats and weapon you may have collected over time. Blueprints will reveal how all these items can be combined to make different items. So, there's a lot to get your teeth stuck into if you haven't partaken of the War Update.

PCZONE
FREE-O-METER



Not free!

0
HOURS

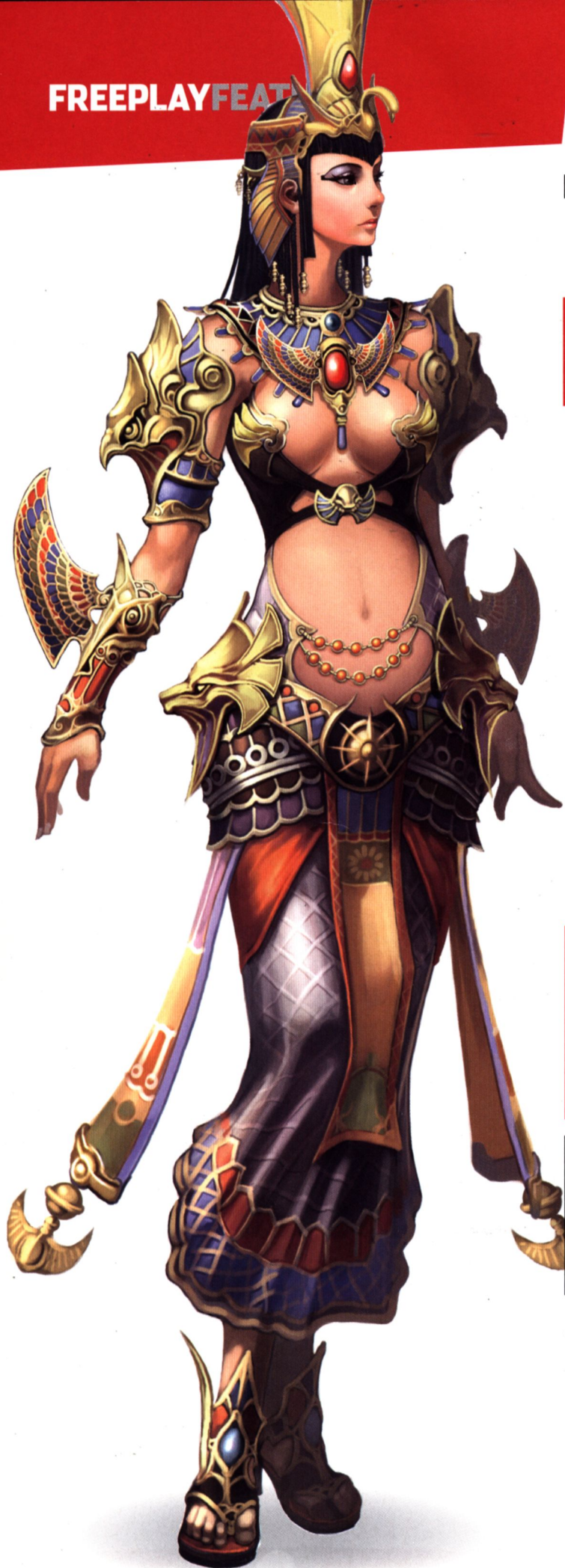
*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month



Free!

898
HOURS*

FREEPLAYFEATURE



THE TOP 10 FREE MMOs

Stuart Renton picks out the best free-to-play MMOs around

MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER **ONLINE** games are big business. Yet not every developer likes the idea of cash regularly pouring in from subscribers, so they created free-to-play MMOs.

Today there are hundreds of free-to-play MMOs available, ranging from *World*

of *Warcraft* clones to side-scrolling platformers. And just about all of them are terrible. This means finding the best ones around is an epic challenge.

Yet, it is a quest that we've succeeded in! So here, in no particular order, are the 10 best free MMOs for you to play. (Well, nine free, and one not-quite free.)



Jim always fancied redheads with bushy tails.



FREE REALMS

WEBSITE freerealms.com

Free Realms is a *World of Warcraft* clone that's aimed at teen players, but one that manages to avoid ostracising adult gamers, while still being bright and colourful and surprisingly easy to get into.

The class system is based around jobs, which you can change at any time, allowing you to sample all of the game's

considerable content with just one character. In addition, there are lots of mini-games and fun things to do (like cart racing). Like *Perfect World*, you can buy powerful in-game items with real-world cash (when you feel like lording it over the poor). *Free Realms* has modest monthly subscription costs, but cheap still isn't free.

Those outfits are very close to kiddie porn.



Ultraviolence never looked so cute.



DRAGONICA

WEBSITE en.dragonica.gpotato.eu

Dragonica is a side-scrolling action adventure that's part beat-'em up and part MMO. And it's very cute. Sickeningly cute. In fact, it's an addictive sheep-slaying, teddy bear-filled, physics-defying, happy-go-lucky cartoon adventure that's so sweet it could induce nausea. It's the red-headed stepchild of *Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles* meets *Hello Kitty Adventures*, and the gameplay is pure *Tom and Jerry* action all the way.

Being of Chinese origin, it's bizarre and utterly baffling, but it's great fun. If worryingly child-focused, character-wise.

That birdie is lethal.



Wonder what Freud would say?



DUNGEON RUNNERS

WEBSITE dungeonrunners.com

Dungeon Runners is a *Diablo* knock-off (did I say knock-off? I meant loving recreation) that's been turned into a decent MMO. It's a cute, self-deprecating, if hugely generic, perfectly playable fantasy MMO.

Of all the games on this list, the 'you need to have a subscription to get the most out of the game' factor has never been more evident than with this game. You're only 10 minutes in before you get your first rare item which you eagerly try to equip, before discovering that you must have a paid subscription to enjoy the privileges of such loot. It's a cheap tactic which ultimately lowers the overall experience of the game for players.



Surely she'd fall over wielding that?



Skeletons? Yep. Spiders? Yep. Sentient trees? Yep.



Smile and say "Death to all who stand in my way!"



Should've left that zit alone.

PERFECT WORLD

WEBSITE perfectworld.com.my

Heralded as "Asia's best MMO" *Perfect World* has haunting music, stunning graphics, and outstanding character customisation options. But looks aren't everything. Add soul-sapping grind (at higher levels) to the mix, and this is

one game which quickly loses its appeal. The ability to buy powerful items with real world currency is cool, but can put others off. Ultimately, it's just another shallow Asian MMO – one that just looks better than the rest.



"This is one game which quickly loses its appeal"

Not one, but two penis compensators.



Eventually Heidi turned to drink.



Their honeymoon was plain illegal.



"Fly me home now. I'm bloody frozen!"

ANARCHY ONLINE

WEBSITE anarchy-online.com

The first sci-fi MMO deserves a place in the hallowed halls of MMO history. While its popularity has dwindled over the years, the fact that it is now completely free-to-play makes it a worthy addition to this list. With some highly atmospheric locations and a truly innovative random mission generator, this is a game well worth checking out.



ATLANTICA ONLINE

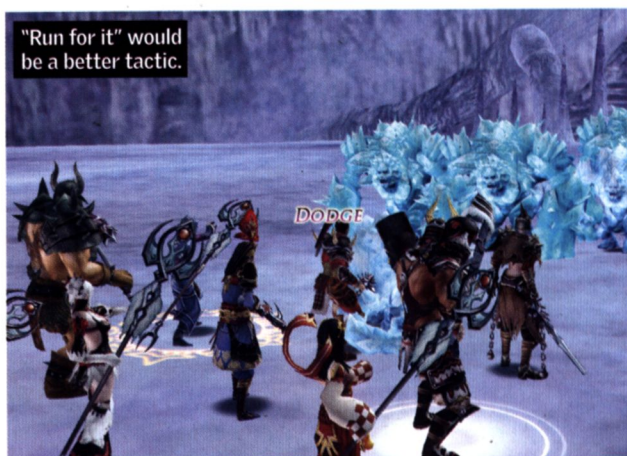
WEBSITE atlantica.ndoorsgames.com

A turn-based MMO in which you control a party of adventurers on your quest to power and glory through a generic fantasy world.

Entering combat transforms the game world into an isometric grid where you manipulate your fighters, wizards and henchmen to victory in

battle (instead of hitting the same function keys in repetitive strain injury inducing monotony).

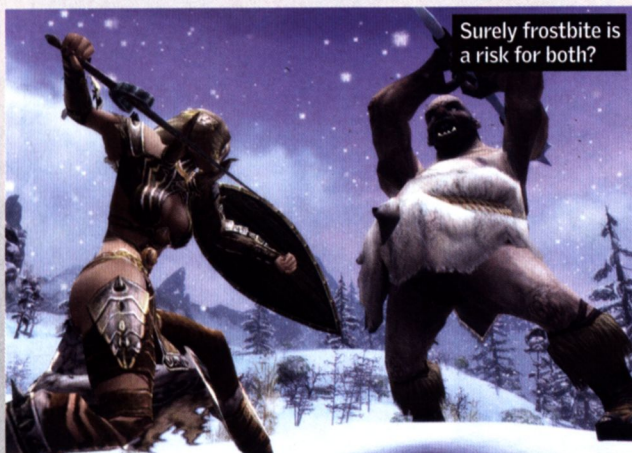
This game has an interesting concept, but ultimately, like all Asian MMOs, no matter how pretty or clever it thinks it is, it always devolves into a grindfest in the end.



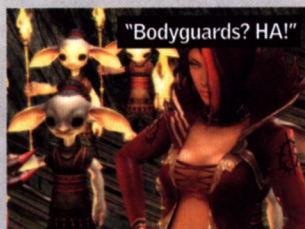
GUILD WARS

WEBSITE guildwars.com

This is not really an MMO in the traditional sense, but *Guild Wars*' PvP gaming is superior to almost any other MMO of its type. Heavily instanced, the questing/role-playing elements are weak, but you can skip all that by creating a high-level character solely for the purposes of getting straight into the PvP action. It does cost you \$20 to start, but then it's free all the way.



Surely frostbite is a risk for both?



"Bodyguards? HA!"



Stood up. Again.



One man and his Max-a-like.



She's either a mage or a burlesque dancer.

RUNESCAPE

WEBSITE runescape.com

Java-based *RuneScape* should be called *The Graphics That Time Forgot!* This visuals-lite game is slow and dreary, but what it does have is a great story. Lots

and lots of it. So, unless you like battling your way through pages of text before (and after) every battle, this isn't the game for you.



When swine flu struck.



"Dr Strangelove arrived yet?"

RUNES OF MAGIC

WEBSITE runesofmagic.com

Runes of Magic is basically a lesser version of *World of Warcraft*. What it lacks in polish it makes up for because it's free-to-play (to a point – you have to spend more of your cash on the game's currency, Diamonds, if you want to get ahead). If you've grown bored of *Warcraft* then there's enough here to rekindle your enthusiasm for the genre. Aside from a few cosmetic differences though, it's practically the same game. The account registration system is a real pain, too.



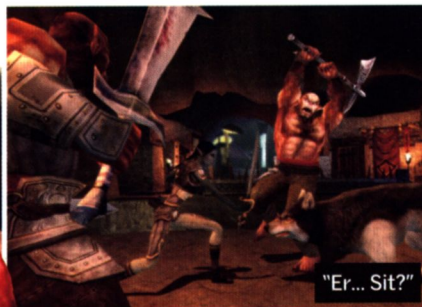
DUNGEONS & DRAGONS ONLINE: EBERRON UNLIMITED

WEBSITE ddo.com

Poorly designed, poorly implemented and not at all what the pen-and-paper fans wanted, *Dungeons & Dragons Online* was a random dungeon generator attached to the basic shell of a MMO. Fast-forward a

couple of years, make the game free, and things change dramatically. Based (very) loosely on the *D&D* 3rd edition rule set, it's actually got a lot going for it

with some truly fun quests and many exciting high-level adventures to be had. It's better still with a group of friends to adventure with.



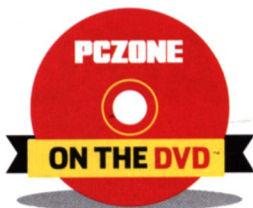
IN CLOSING

What you have is arguably the 10 best free-to-play MMOs out there in the virtual world. However, be warned: while a game may seem free-to-play, there are often hidden costs lurking just under the surface.

You really need to be a paying customer to get the best out of these games, whether that's buying in-game currency, paying for a subscription, or simply being able to buy virtual items with real-world cash. Every title sets out to compel you to spend your hard-earned money. *RuneScape* has a huge bar at the top of the screen saying "Subscribe, for God's sake! Our children won't eat tonight if you don't pay for membership!"

Clearly, there's no such thing as genuinely free, so if you want to play these games as they were intended, then you'll simply have to pay for them.

Demos



A peak at this month's flat polymer donut

COLIN MCRAE: DIRT 2

Time to get really filthy

WEBSITE dirt2game.com

DESPITE INVOLVING FAST cars, rallying has never been as trendy as other motorsports. Even truck racing has more glamour. Maybe it has something to with the lack of attractive women hanging around the start line of a rally course (wise move, lest they get splattered by mud) or the unsexy locations (the Lake District is not Monaco).

So in order to sex things up, *DIRT 2* has done away with reality in favour of a fantasy world tour. Complete with sex symbol indie kid racers, dramatic locations for their races, and a killer racing engine.

This demo features two sample races: a Trailblazer point-to-point race in the Moroccan desert, in a Mitsubishi Eclipse GT; and a Landrush race, where you're in an eight-vehicle race at California's Ensenada Port circuit, using a West Coast Choppers Stuka TT truck.

And if you're lucky enough to have the hardware you have more of a treat, as this demo is DirectX 11 ready.



PROBLEM ZONE

Trouble with your DVD? Help is at hand!

1. If the menu doesn't appear when the disc spins up, open the Run command from the Start menu and enter D:\pcz.exe (D is the DVD drive's letter).
2. If you have a problem with a specific demo or application, check the DVD's Help section. Also ensure your PC's drivers and DirectX version are up-to-date.
3. If that doesn't work check our forums at pczone.co.uk for fixes, or send an email to us at letters@pczone.com. Please describe the problem, what you were doing when it occurred, any error messages that came up, and your system's details.
4. If the DVD itself is faulty, send it and an SAE to Disc Department, Reader Support, Future Publishing Ltd, Bath, BA1 2BW, to get a new one.

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COCKPIT VIEW

Here you're speeding around a dirt track. It's not your typical rally course though, as you don't need track notes. Either that or you left without your co-driver.



SKID ROW

Skidding around bends is part of the rally driver's skill set. But remember, the police frown on this kind of breakneck side-on approach to cornering on suburban streets.

ROLLING AROUND IN THE DIRT...



FAKE RALLY

Those are beach buggies! They aren't proper rally cars, like the Subaru Impreza WRC or the Escort RS Cosworth! But they're a damn sight more fun to race with.



STICK SHIFT

Check out that GPS unit. It seems rally drivers go it solo now. Maybe we should expect the Rally Co-Driver Union to call a strike to protest mass redundancies soon.

JAMES CAMERON'S AVATAR

Thunder, Thunder, Thundercats HO!

WEBSITE avatargame.us.ubi.com

SADLY, ALTHOUGH THIS game does feature blue cat people, it has nothing to do with the *Thundercats*. Instead, you're a corporate space marine who's part of a force that's

been sent to colonise a planet, Pandora. Only to end up fighting the local Na'vi (the blue cat people).

The whole avatar concept comes about as you can play as a space marine who's a straight soldier that can inhabit the body of a Na'vi, like a disturbing puppeteer.

This demo takes you through a few stages of *Avatar's* game. While the game is hardly anything new, it's damn pretty when you play using those NVIDIA 3D goggles we keep going on about.



What did banshees ever do to you, eh?

THE CAT'S MEOW



MEOW!

This fellow is an avatard Na'vi. He kills things for his Thundercat pals.



HU YAH!

This is a space marine from a military-industrial business. He kills things for capitalism.

BEST OF THE REST



Nearly there. Here's the pick of the rest of the stuff that's packed on this issue's DVD...



18 WHEELS OF STEEL: EXTREME TRUCKER

extremetrucker.com

When this demo arrived, Steve started drooling at the prospect of driving a big truck along a frozen river.

OPFLASH 2: DRAGON RISING

You're in the army now - really

WEBSITE flashpointgame.com

THIS DEMO INCLUDES a taste of *OpFlash 2's* multiplayer mode. If you are the sort of person who enjoys *Counter-Strike*, you'll hate this game.

Really this is a simulator rather than an FPS, so you can be shot in the head by someone on the horizon, who you'll never see. That said, unlike its rival

Arma II, *OpFlash 2* doesn't forget it's a game, so its hardcore elements are reserved for the highest difficulty levels.

The demo takes you, and your mates, through the game's first full mission. So if you want more from an FPS co-op than slicing up zombies, this demo is just for you.



1. ALLIED ASSAULT

Your CPU-controlled chums are surprisingly intelligent on the whole.

2. RADIAL SONG

A controversial element, the order menu is designed with an analogue stick in mind. It still works though.

3. NEED A MEDIC!

As you get hit by bullets, explosions and so on, you limbs get redder. Too red and they might fall off.

MILITARY LIFE



THINK AHEAD

May not be the most exciting thing you'll see in this game, but smart use of maps like this will save your life.



FISHER-LIKE

In the darkness you can use every pervert's favourite piece of kit: night-vision goggles.



MASSIVE ASSAULT NETWORK 2

massiveassaultnetwork.com

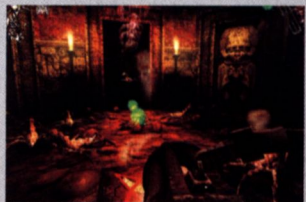
Online multiplayer sci-fi strategy. Could be great, if strategy is your thing.



MEN OF WAR: RED TIDE

menofwargame.com/rt

This mix of RTS and third-person shooter about WWII Soviet marines, who didn't exist. So what? This is a computer game, not a history lesson.



DARK SALVATION

darksalvation.com

This occult-ish shooter has the elements of the original *Painkiller*. The graphics are dated, but if you're fond of old-school shooters, you should try it out.

HOT DOWNLOADS
PCZONE

OPERATION BARBAROSSA: THE STRUGGLE FOR RUSSIA

snipurl.com/barbarossa

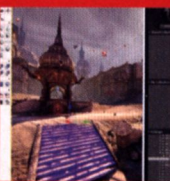
The publisher of this strategy game says it's "aimed at all levels". So you won't need to be an expert in hexes to recreate the most idiotic military move of the last century.



UDK: COMPLETE VIDEO TUTORIAL PACK

snipurl.com/udkvideos

Last issue we gave away the *Unreal Development Kit*. Now if you're wondering what to do with it, download all 3.42GB of these videos. You'll also need the tutorial assets at snipurl.com/udkvidassets.



Freeware

Adam Glick sorts free wheat from costly chaff



PCZONE

ON THE DVD

This month get battling loads of zombies (yet again), but in a classic Windows way; run along platforms collecting stars (yet again); beat up loads of people one-on-one (yet again); learn to love Tetris (yet again); and help a brain get through some tough times (oh... er... not yet again.)

GLICK'S PICK



DESTROY THE LEVEL

DEVELOPER Sauli
WEBSITE musegames.com/community/immunitychallenge

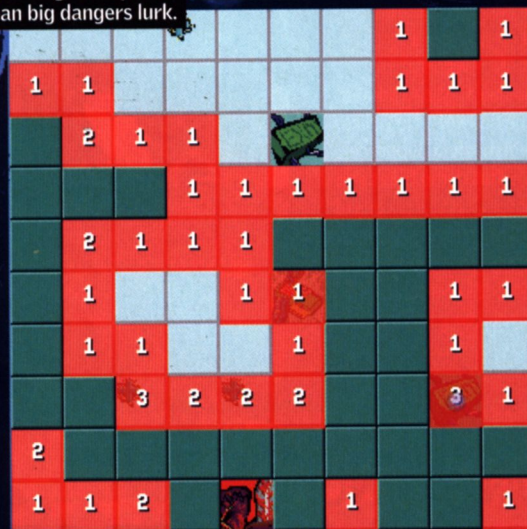
THE WORDS "FIENDISHLY" and "difficult", in that order, combine to form the perfect description of *Destroy the Level*, a game in which you have to create safe passage for a giant floating brain. The brain moves at a constant speed from left to right, so your job is to drag objects out of the way or, more often, into other objects in order to knock them down.

As a puzzle game, it succeeds on all levels. It's extraordinarily difficult, yet you always feel like you can succeed with just a bit of luck and a little inspiration. Even if you've failed 100 times before. Thankfully, when you do die, you get to come back instantly as the load times are lightning quick, eliminating most of the frustration. There's also the temptation to throw objects about willy nilly and just hope for the best, yet precision and quick thinking always win the day.

Destroy the Level is a little picky with how it picks up your clicks and drags, but generally it's a flawless browser game that deserves to be played often.

Throbbing red squares mean big dangers lurk.

Level status



You've found a sector exit!

LEVEL

8/8

ENERGY

50/120

Retire

SCORE

20375

ITEM 1

Examine/Use

DEFENDER

ITEM 2

Examine/Use

MOBILE 05

ITEM 3

Examine/Use

ITEM 4

ONSLAUGHT OF THE ELECTRIC ZOMBIES

Will the plague of living dead never end?

DEVELOPER Rodain Joubert WEBSITE snipurl.com/electriczombies

THE SMALLEST GAME of the month has both the longest title and the most words written about it. Oh, the irony. It's fully justified, though. *Onslaught of the Electric Zombies* is a cracking little game, albeit just a *Minesweeper* clone with some twiddly bits added.

As with other *Minesweeper* variants your goal is to click on the tiles that you think don't contain mines (or, in this case, zombies). However, the twist here is that to get the biggest scores, you have to sacrifice health points by fighting the hidden undead creatures.

Clicking on a square that contains a zombie begins a fight. The more damage a creature inflicts on you, the more points you get. Complete eight levels (on the short version, substantially

more on the long variant) and you get a bonus for making it to retirement, perhaps even pushing you all the way to the top of the online leaderboard.

Upgrades allow you to customise each game you play, with all of the bonuses being useful at certain times. These include toughening yourself and reducing the damage done by the zombie; increases to points scored and item slots available; as well as help in detecting nearby zombies. At no point does your choice of upgrades make you feel like all your bases are covered, but then you also never feel like you've upgraded the wrong things and are painted into a corner.

As you progress, you'll sometimes click on empty squares that have items on them. These are buffing devices with

names like 'Zombie Dog' and various references to Google, for some reason. (The Googlebot shows the location of everything on the map, so is one of the most powerful ones to get.)

Unless you upgrade your item slots, you can only hold one item at a time, so it must be chosen and used wisely. There's also a random event that steals away an item of yours, so you need to watch out for that.

At the end of the day, this is easily one of the most interesting indie games I've played for a long time, despite its derivative nature. It's one of those games that sucks in the minutes as you play it until you realise you've not done any work for the past four hours. Luckily, playing games is my job, so I can get away with it.



The Googlebot is very useful.

BULLETS OF A REVOLVER

Cartoon can-can cowboy karate capers

DEVELOPER DieFox WEBSITE bulletsofarevolver.blogspot.com

CRAPPY BEAT-'EM-UPS DOG the indie scene like some giant dogging thing (nothing to do with Stan Collymore, we promise). While *Bullets of a Revolver* does a lot to lift itself out of the primordial ooze that is the mundane, it slips back in because of two things: first, the style of the cartoon graphics, and second, the frustrating and repetitive gameplay.

Initially, the omens and portents are promising. There are a lot of options to choose from, with a story mode, one-off bouts and a versus mode to have a gander at. Nothing groundbreaking, sure, but for an indie game you can't always take such obvious modes for granted. It's simple to learn the basics, with various *Street Fighter*-esque

special moves and such easy to pull off, plus there are even some mini-games to spice things up a little bit.

Sadly, the game's not fun. The graphics just grate and the music, despite the composers being flagged up heavily in the opening credits, is annoying enough to make you turn to playing in silence.

Moves don't always get picked up properly, the initial key controls flash on and off too quickly, leaving you perplexed in the main menu and the AI opponents spam the same attacks and seem capable of hitting you through your block attempt.

A failed effort, despite the clear love that's gone into it. Next time, a dogging simulator, please.



PIXELPROJECT

Mario has a lot to answer for

DEVELOPER Balazs Sabransky WEBSITE pixelproject.pixelinvoke.com

PLATFORMERS ARE THE staple diet of the indie gamer, making up at least 892% of the releases we cast our eyes over at Zone Towers. It has to be something special to catch our eyes and *PixelProject* is that, for the most part. But despite its flaws it remains superior to most of its peers.

So, *PixelProject* involves a creature in a white suit leaping about collecting coins for points and so on. Not the most original of starts, but originality isn't always needed. Sometimes the tried-and-tested formulae are worn down to a nub for a reason – they work. Collecting coins is natural in a platformer, so that is what you have to do. Jumping on the heads of enemies is also a cliché, so that's in the mix as well.

Depth comes from having a level design that, while still being 2D, allows for an above-and-below dynamic. Pressing the up or down keys allows you to view the terrain on either end of the Y-axis. This helps when you end up taking the blind jumps into the unknown that occasionally crop up. It also helps when trying to figure out how to grab the elusively placed coins in strange locations.

The major problem for the game isn't a lack of



originality or charm, it's that if you accidentally destroy certain wooden crates, you'll be unable to progress. This, rather serious, flaw in level design is very annoying.

Also, sometimes what's supposed to happen doesn't, which also prevents you progressing further. If those things are fixed then this will become a perfectly enjoyable platformer.

>.>
I need to be careful!

He's not wrong.

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH



DEFLECTORPOOL

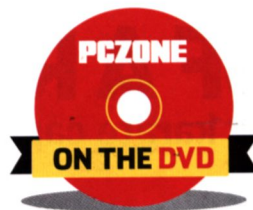
DEVELOPER DrPetter
WEBSITE snipurl.com/deflectorpool

THERE CAN'T BE many games that have spawned as many followers as *Tetris*, *Deflectorpool* being yet another. But this one differs from the rest in that it's fun. You move a ball and chain attached to the bottom of a floating platform. Balls fall into the water, and you have to stop them falling down the plughole by collecting them.

To do that you have to hold the left mouse button and touch a ball to turn your device into that colour. Then you can collect balls of that hue, but not others. When more of a different colour turn up, change to that one and so on. As time goes by, another colour is added and things get very frantic.

Deflectorpool is a lovely little time waster, and we'll hate you if you don't play it.

Extend

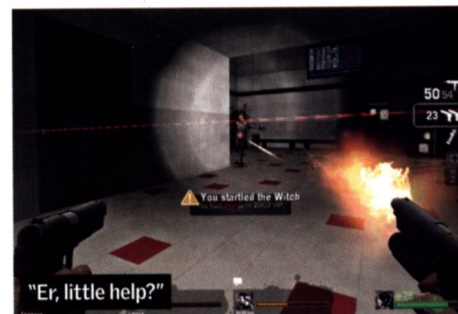


David Brown picks out the best mods and maps

VIENNA CALLING

Into the mall of the living dead

MOD FOR Left 4 Dead [WEBSITE: snipurl.com/viennacalling](http://www.snipurl.com/viennacalling)



AT THE TIME of writing, we've not seen anything worthwhile come out for *Left 4 Dead 2*, so while Uncle Phil and the gang wait patiently for new adventures to come their way, it's time to put our faith back in Zoey and her siren song.

For some reason, she and her fellow survivors have ended up in Austria; specifically, Vienna – the birthplace of zombie Marie Antoinette, zombie Sigmund Freud and zombie Ludwig Wittgenstein. None of whom who'll be killing as you traverse various places of interest from the Austrian capital.

Let's start at the end. The finale is really good, set on top of an incredibly high building with a gate needing to be opened to allow access to a rescue helicopter. Unfortunately, it's a finale to a long trudge of a level. I suppose there's an argument there that, if this didn't happen, it'd just make it too easy,

but it's still frustrating to be dumped so far back every time. It's also just your regular finale, which after seeing the more interesting things served up in *L4D2*, isn't so exciting any more.

Still, that's no fault of the modders, who have limited tools to work with and

Death Aboard) but it does well with what it attempts to bring to the table.

The levels' lengths are just about right, although they feel long. Played on Expert, they require a high level of skill.

Vienna Calling is still being worked on, and it does have a couple of glitchy

another playthrough, fell over a railing into the sewers and ended up stuck forever in the murky waters. A horrible end for anyone, I'm sure you'll agree.

Regardless of these problems, *Vienna Calling* is a worthy campaign to drop into your addons folder.

The biggest flaw with this campaign, at the time of writing, is that it doesn't have Versus mode. This is a shame as it'd have been interesting to see how the levels would have stood up to that sort of gameplay.

Vienna Calling is a small download and it's on the cover disc, so give it a try and show Zoey that you still love her.

"A solid set of maps, with a few touches to keep things interesting"

can put features from a different game into their campaign.

As a whole, *Vienna Calling* is a solid set of maps, with a few touches to keep things interesting. Plenty of attention has been put into recreating famous Viennese areas, such as a train station and a mini-graveyard, within the scope of the engine and game. It's by no means the best use of new textures and objects (which remains

bits in it. At one point during testing, one of my team was punched by a Tank and ended up stuck halfway up a wooden wall. Luckily, he was able to extricate himself from his lofty perch and didn't suffer any other undue effects.

Unlike Dan Marshall (of *Time Gentlemen, Please!* fame) who, during



THE WITCHING HOUR



Time to call Venkman and the boys.

Wanted: players for *UT3* mods

MOD FOR Unreal Tournament 3 [WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/the-witching-hour](http://moddb.com/mods/the-witching-hour)

WE WROTE ABOUT *Renegade X* in our last issue (PCZ 216) and lamented the fact no sod was playing it. Well, rinse and repeat for *The Witching Hour*, a multiplayer horror game where one set of players are ghosts and the other are humans attempting to survive the night.

For some reason, a load of humans have found themselves shut up in some haunted locations and have to make sure the ghosts don't kill them before daybreak. This is a simple premise and one that should work well, if anyone

played it. While the haunted garden maze looks a bit weak and is very, very dark, the mansion levels are great.

Some very impressive ideas are present, like light switches: flick the switch on to explore the room, but then a ghost flicks it off behind you, leaving you stranded. Excellent stuff.

But, as I say, there's virtually nobody playing. If people could tear themselves from *Counter-Strike*, they'd finally find the wonderful world of interesting mods out there. This and *Renegade X* are but two of them.

ARCHASIS II

Break out the chain mail bikinis

MOD FOR Unreal Tournament 3 [WEBSITE archasis.com](http://moddb.com/mods/archasis)

GET YOUR GREAVES on and start making jokes about buffing helmets and donning codpieces. *Archasis II* is a sword-and-sorcery mod for *UT3*, and a sequel to the warmly received *UT2K4* mod *Archasis: Battle for Durian*. Plus it's a finalist in this year's Make Something Unreal competition. Sadly, despite all these credentials, it's lukewarm.

Archasis II is described as an objective-oriented co-op game, which it is. It's just that, when clicking

on the Multiplayer and LAN options in the main menu brings just a "Not enabled yet" message, you're left with just the solo mode, which isn't anywhere as fun as it would be with a couple of other players.

You can see the effort put into making this a real quality mod, but unless you can play it with other people, it's not worth doing. Maybe by the time you read this it'll be fully multiplayer-enabled, but right now, it's one to keep in the back of your mind.



Hackity stabby.

MINERVA: METASTASIS

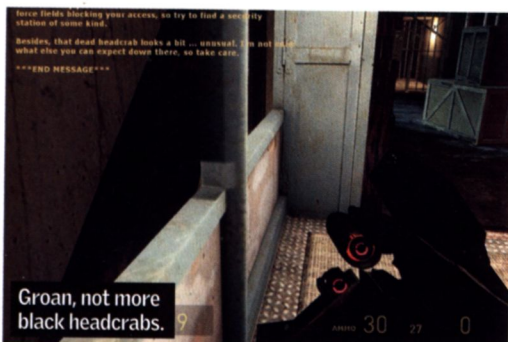
Gods come to the Freeman's world

MOD FOR Half-Life 2 [WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/minerva](http://moddb.com/mods/minerva)

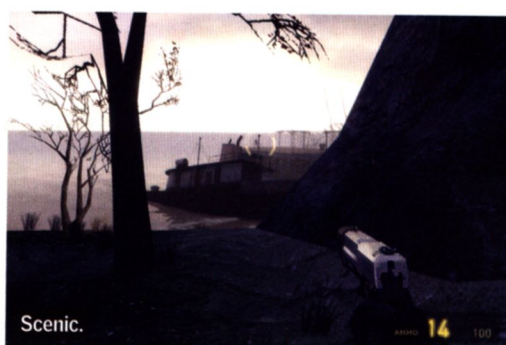
SOME MODS TALK a good game, but not all of them deliver. This is one such mod. While it's not bad (it's perfectly sound) its concept is pretentious, considering you're still just shooting a lot of Combine soldiers in *Half-Life 2*.

Don't get me wrong: it's still fun to do that and the plot does intrigue to an extent, but it all smacks a little of student types desperately trying to put their study of Greek mythology to some practical use.

Minerva: Metastasis is fine in theory and, having said all this, the later levels and episodes (*Minerva 2-4*) are pretty cool. It's not an essential play at all, but it's worth a shot if you're at a loose end one evening.



Groan, not more black headcrabs.



Scenic.

MOD CONS!

The add-ons to avoid



GTA: JASON LIVES!

MOD FOR GTA: San Andreas
[WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/gta-jason-lives](http://moddb.com/mods/gta-jason-lives)

It seems *Grand Theft Auto* games get the most ridiculous mods out there. Why is someone spending their time making a mod for *San Andreas* where you get to run around as Jason Voorhees out of the *Friday the 13th* movies? Why?

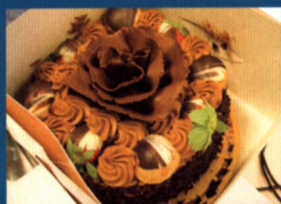
Online Zone

What's new in *PC ZONE*'s forum and Fight Club

A shortened version of everybody's favourite section of the magazine this month, due to the grab for personal glory that Fight Club went for this month. You've still got the twittering and the forum dwellers venting spleens and roaring forth righteous anger. Back to normal next time.

tw@tter

Tweeting like a bird



CAN YOU BELIEVE that *The Force Unleashed* takes up over 25GB of hard disk space? As we mentioned on our feed, we're puzzled as to just how high the definition is on its Wookiees, for that is surely the only reason so much space has to be used up.

Now let's talk about cake. You know we like cake and so one of you brought a huge, obesity-inducing monster to Fight Club Live! for us. It was only with the greatest restraint that we actually held back from chomping it right there.

Having said all that, there's one thing that's more important to us than cake and that's turning our keyboard LEDs into network traffic indicators. The age we live in is truly one of great amazement.

More nonsense and stuff about food can be found if you follow @pczone or just go to twitter.com/pczone.

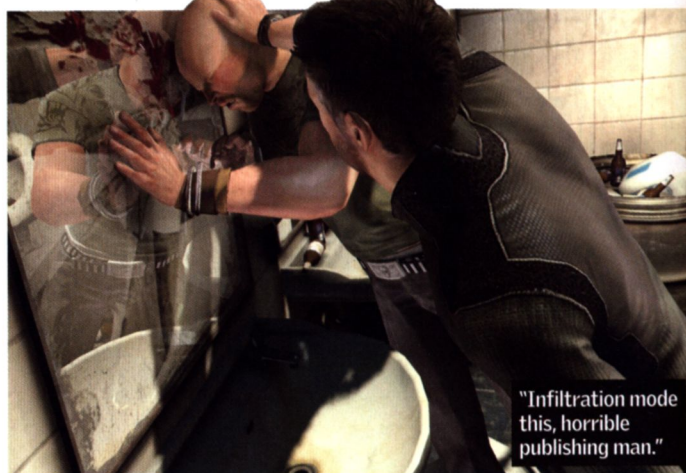
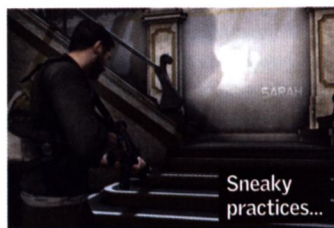
NOTES FROM THE FORUM

So, DLC... you really, really don't like it, do you?

THETINGLER: We've had some right royal bollocks going on in the world of Day One DLC and Collector's Editions (*Dragon Age* getting a lot of righteous bile here), but frankly *Splinter Cell Conviction* has pissed me off most. The Infiltration Mode (This is only available in *Conviction*'s Collector's Edition at the time of writing - Ed). "Eliminate all hostiles in the mission area without being detected"? That's a whole damn part of the game, and an excellent sounding bit at that!

DR_DARK: Is this becoming the No.1 topic we've been complaining about for the last six months?

ANDY_MONAHAN: I had no problems with *Dragon Age: Origins* having DLC on day one. It's already been supported better than L4Cash. I also enjoyed all the Collector's Edition stuff. Going to do the same for *Mass Effect* as well.



I don't buy into all this *COD/L4D1-2* bollocks so I'm allowing myself this.

LIQUID_METAL: EA can't take away BioWare's awesomeness so I allow them their DLC moments

SUNSCRAMBLE: The big question is where do you all draw the line? Are you the sort of sap that will bend over and take it like a bitch, or are you going to draw a manly imaginary line in the imaginary sand and patrol it in a manly way, hefting a very manly imaginary baseball bat? If they want to start

punishing me for having the sheer brass balls to actually buy a legal copy, then they can go cry somewhere else when I decide not to play along.

JONNY_P66: I never pay full price for games, only £5 or £10 at most. Minor DLC snaffling doesn't really bother me.

BAGSABBIS: *Assassin's Creed 2* is the perfect example of where someone has gone way over the line. It would be like for *Dragon Age* if they had made it so you had to pay for DLC to get one of the characters' back story.

CAN'T MAKE FIGHT CLUB?

If you find yourself unable to make it to Fight Club - perhaps you've won a set of speakers at Fight Club Live! and are bathing in their awesome sound - then join other PCZ readers on the following public servers.

WHO'S WHO

Steve Hogarty [PCZ]misterbrilliant
David Brown [PCZ]plughead
Phil Wand [PCZ]peoplesfrontofjudea
Jon Blyth [PCZ]log
Will Porter [PCZ]batsphinx
Nick Brakespear [PCZ]flatline
Chris Capel [PCZ]thetinger

BATTLEFIELD 2

85.236.100.48:16567

CALL OF DUTY 4:

MODERN WARFARE
 85.236.100.48:28960

COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE

85.236.100.48:27015

DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE

85.236.100.48:27315

HALF-LIFE 2: DEATHMATCH

85.236.100.48:27215

TEAM FORTRESS 2

85.236.100.48:27115

SERVERS
 PROVIDED BY...



MULTIPLAY

WHAT'S THE SCORE, DADDY-O?



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Google 'GamesRadar Shop' for details.

Retrozone

Facing the wrong way since 1995...

Flashback

THE LOST FILES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES: THE CASE OF THE SERRATED SCALPEL

ONCE, EA MADE games that weren't vacuous cash-ins on existing brands. At one point, they had a soul that let them take a risk on two *Sherlock Holmes* point-and-clicks in the early-to-mid '90s, the first of which concerns us today.

By the time *The Case of the Rose Tattoo* came around (the second game) EA were turning into the behemoth they are today, capable of churning out two identical football games in one calendar year and having the gall to charge full price for both without batting an eyelid.

Serrated Scalpel was one of the, if not the actual, first games I played with talkie bits. Such advanced hoopla came at a price: eight megabytes of RAM, I believe it was. My humble 286 couldn't handle such wizardry and it was only later, when I had the power of my 486DX4/100 that I could appreciate the glory that was *Serrated Scalpel*.

As Holmes, with Watson in tow, you embarked on a remarkably long journey through a huge variety of locations in London Town. Perfumeries, rugby clubs

in Kensington, opera houses and even a local tavern, creating one of the most authentic (within reason) experiences I've experienced. Certainly it's the best Holmes game I've ever played, just for atmosphere alone.

The whole game was full of objects to look at, people to talk to and puzzles to solve, with seamless changes to what we'd now called mini-games worked in all the time. Chemical analyses, playing darts against local toughs at the pub and so on all came into it and not once did you feel any of it was tacked on.

That there was so much to do and examine made it feel like a Holmes story. Having him look at five different objects in a room in modern games is wrong; he needs to be examining everything, even things unimportant to our eyes.

As a Holmes buff there's nothing worse to me than people screwing up Holmes. So, boo to Guy Richie and any idiot who says modernising Holmes is the way to go, and huzzah to old EA for producing this wondrous game for my childhood self to savour.



But how? Make Holmes live again!

Holmes has a place in the hearts of us all, even if you claim not to like him and are just being a arse about everything. Holmes knows you love him and want to read about his extraordinary adventures. And play them too. There are a number of ways of doing this, but clearly the easiest way is the criminal's path, one trodden by Holmes

himself when he wanted to get the job done without recourse to warrants. We can't officially advocate this, though.

google.co.uk

Type in the name of the game into Google and you might be presented with certain options we would describe as despicable.

The Dancing Men A glance at the protagonists of this epic and twisted tale



1 221B OR NOT 221B

Holmes is at his best in this, about a murder made to look like the Ripper's work.



2 DUNCE CAP

Watson might be more idiotic than usual in this game, but his presence proves crucial at times.



3 AN INSPECTOR CALLS

Lestrade is willfully ignorant at times, but he's the best Scotland Yard has to offer.



4 BEST FRIEND

Toby the dog helps Holmes with following scent trails, an indispensable ally in such circumstances.



5 THE VICTIM

Sarah Carroway gets her throat slit right at the start, so you don't get to see much of her.

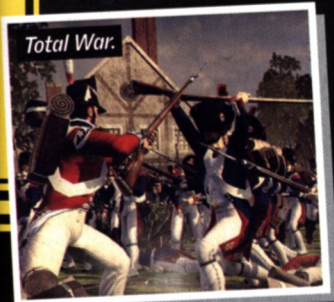


6 BOY WONDER

Wiggins and his Baker Street Irregulars help Holmes scour London for vital clues and information.

Now & Then

NAPOLEON: TOTAL WAR vs FIELDS OF GLORY



WHILE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY'S *Napoleon: Total War* might have the graphical edge, it'll never have the impact *Fields of Glory* did on me way back in 1994. Essentially *Fields of Glory* was the battle bit of *Napoleon* with no campaign map, pre-empting *Total War's* style by nearly a decade.

Controlling blocks of men on Napoleonic battlefields like Ligny, Quatre-Bras and Waterloo itself, you had to contend with conflicts that were epic in scope. Not as epic as the ones in *Sid Meier's Gettysburg!* or *Antietam!*, but close. You could get into houses and defend them, form great squares and use cannons and cavalry to devastating effect. And the manual was absolutely sodding huge, with almost an entire history of the battles inside.

Why can't we have manuals like that nowadays? I want my manuals!



Totally 16-bit.

Play it! How to fight Napoleon like it was 1994

- 1 *Fields of Glory* should be available from all good abandonware websites, which is where you'll all look first, naturally. (And by 'good' of course we mean 'extremely naughty'.)
- 2 There's always the chance some kind soul is selling his or her original boxed copy somewhere online, maybe at a popular auction website, complete with its manual.
- 3 Definitely go for the buying route if you can, because the manual is a thing of book-y beauty, with all sorts of history contained within. It's like a huge textbook. Only fun.
- 4 Failing all that, just join a Napoleonic era re-enactment group and get down in the mud with your fellow men. Followed by small children laughing at you.

MAMEframe

JURASSIC PARK

NINETY PERCENT OF people never get past the first level of any arcade game. Probably for that reason, the T-rex shows up almost right away in *Jurassic Park*. Shortly after that the velociraptors arrive, followed by those spitting ones that got the dastardly Nedry. Then there are pterodactyls, the brontosaurus, and some triceratops.

Finally, when the developers are certain that nobody's still piling 50p coins into the machine, your car crashes into the Welcome Centre, where every different type of dinosaur is thrown at you at once.

You've got to shoot them all as your car whizzes uncontrollably about the island, and at one point you drive up a brontosaurus's tail and ramp off his head, which makes it, to be frank, our game of the year.

WHAT IS MAME?

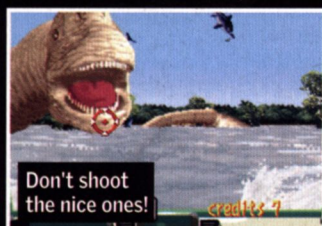
The Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator runs over 3,500 games. You can get it from mamedev.org or from this issue's DVD (we've also got 32 and 64-bit versions of MameUI, which has a nice interface). But downloading games for it is illegal. So don't.



A sleeping T-rex is cute.



Not a good sight. (sh start button credits 5)



Don't shoot the nice ones! (credits 7)

Time Charts

SUPER MEGA CHARTS

ANYONE ELSE REMEMBER Virgin Megastores? They're probably just called Virgin stores now, but once they had a big second word at the end, inciting people to pop in and buy games in huge boxes because they were MEGA!

They also sponsored a second chart in the hallowed pages of *PC ZONE* way back in November 2002. It was next to the big official ChartTrack one, which was deemed to be the most important, even if it didn't have 'mega' anywhere near it. And boy, what a set of interesting lists those two were. The start of *Sims*-mania was plain to see, with three bloody variants of the damn thing beginning to gobble up places. One was the main game, of course, and two were expansions. The Virgin chart only had the *On Holiday* expansion, thankfully. Which was MEGA!

PC ZONE Top 10 November 2002

- 1 **MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR** ACTIVISION
- 2 **THE SIMS: ON HOLIDAY** EA
- 3 **WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS** SIERRA
- 4 **THE SIMS** EA
- 5 **THE SIMS: HOT DATE** EA
- 6 **SUDDEN STRIKE II** CDV/FIREGLOW
- 7 **GRAND THEFT AUTO III** ROCKSTAR
- 8 **MEDAL OF HONOUR: ALLIED ASSAULT** EA
- 9 **SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II: DOUBLE HELIX** ACTIVISION
- 10 **NEVERWINTER NIGHTS** ATARI

Virgin Top 10 November 2002

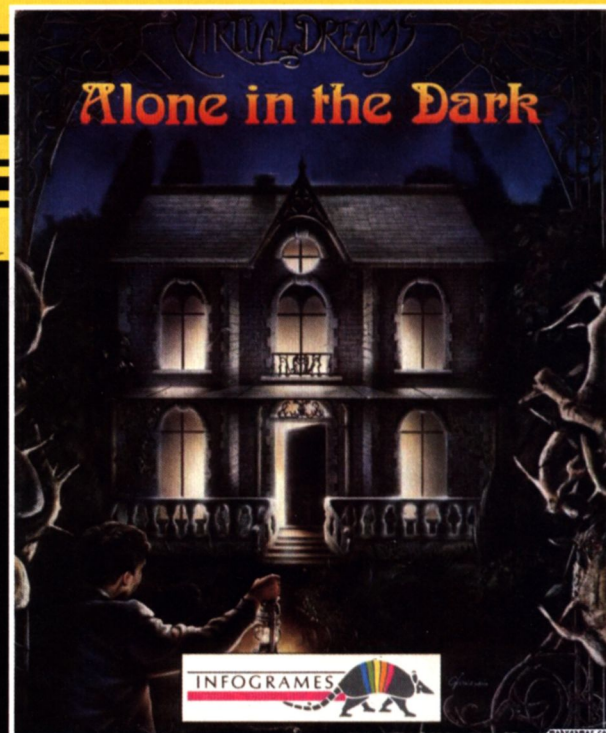
- 1 **GRAND THEFT AUTO III** ROCKSTAR
- 2 **MAX PAYNE** GATHERING OF DEVELOPERS
- 3 **MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR** ACTIVISION
- 4 **WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS** SIERRA
- 5 **NEVERWINTER NIGHTS** ATARI
- 6 **SUDDEN STRIKE II** CDV/FIREGLOW
- 7 **THE SIMS: ON HOLIDAY** EA
- 8 **CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER: SEASON 01/02** EIDOS
- 9 **MEDAL OF HONOUR: ALLIED ASSAULT** EA
- 10 **COSSACKS: GOLD EDITION** CDV

Back In The Day

ALONE IN THE DARK

David Brown has his nerves jangled one more time

DEVELOPER Infogrames PUBLISHER Infogrames RELEASED 1992



As you can see, things don't go well from the start.

I KNEW THERE was a reason why I'd not played *Alone in the Dark* for years. (The original, I mean. Not the could-have-been-great new one that turned out to be rubbish. Just in case you hadn't worked it from the screenshots.)

The reason is the game is nails-through-the-eyelids tough. Being pinned to the floor by the ample thighs of Bella Emborg tough. You know, tough, very hard, incredibly difficult. But oh so wonderful still.

So it's very ragged round the edges and the controls are achingly unwieldy at times, but it's the game we know and love, the game that pretty much kicked the survival horror genre off (even if it wasn't technically the first).

Alone in the Dark was French, of course, so naturally it had to be both weird and difficult. Most French games I played during that period were rock hard and bizarre in equal measures. This one, by nature of its tie-in with the whole Lovecraft Cthulhu Mythos thing, was weird in the right way. It also had the proper Edward Carnby in it, not the action hero from the later games.

GEEK POWER

Like the protagonists in Lovecraft's tales, this Edward Carnby guy was a nerd, a bookworm. He wasn't someone who'd expected to have to blow away undead creatures or solve mysteries in the bowels of the Earth. He was just expecting to review some documents,

Baby Steps

Enter *Alone in the Dark* for the first time... er, again

Your first steps back into *Alone in the Dark* will be tentative ones, just like mine. You'll find yourself muttering "Ah, I remember this" and "Wasn't there something here I could pick up?" a lot.

You'll also forget, just like me, that you have to quickly board up the windows and push a big chest over the trapdoor to stop wolves and zombies harassing you. The chest contains a rifle, though, so you might stand a better chance of fighting them off if you pick that up.



Once you've seen these beasts off, you begin investigating. Your client/relative, depending on if you are Edward Carnby or Emily Hartwood, hung himself in this same loft and you have to find out why. As you progress through the house, manuscripts and diaries fill in the missing pieces, but I won't spoil any of that for you here. Suffice it to say, evil things are abroad and you have to deal with them. It's worth reading the books, as they give you direct clues as to how to deal with enemies as some of them can't just be killed by conventional means. Remember, the saved game is your friend, use it wherever you can.

The game proper starts when you venture out of the confines of the attic and into the main house. Danger lurks at every turn, behind

every closed door. (Another tip for you here. Closing doors behind you is a good idea.) You also start finding weapons and objects here. First up is a bow, but no arrows. See how this game taunts you? The bastard that it is. Ah, don't worry, we've found an old cavalry sabre. That should make short work of any nearby zombies. Sure enough, one turns up almost instantly, and is swiftly dealt with.

Be warned, however – *Alone in the Dark* isn't a game that's going to make things easy for you. Ammunition for guns is scarce and bladed and melee weapons



aren't all they'll appear to be. Don't rely on one weapon too much as there's bound to be lots of occasions where you can't use it. Size up the situation and use the appropriate weapon, making sure not to go overboard and use a blunderbuss against a regular

zombie. You might regret it later. As I did when my sabre broke when I killed the zombie. Sigh.

Ah well, at least I've got four rounds in my rifle. If I'm careful, that'll keep me going for a while. Across the hall is a set of two rooms, a boudoir and an adjoining dressing room.

Closing the door proved vital here, with a zombie appearing in view just as I was slamming it shut. Lucky escape there, but it goes to show that the safety first approach works. For now.

A quick search of the boudoir reveals a vase, which when

"Be warned, however – *Alone in the Dark* isn't a game that's going to make things easy for you"

Must be a teenager's diary.

3000 Frameskip 0 Program: TATOU

March 31

I explored the caverns in a dream.
The dark man came with me.
Strangely, I felt almost well.
How can I describe what I saw?
No. What words are capable of
explaining such evil?
I realized that my death was of
no interest to him. The dark man
wants something else; he seeks a body.

Flicks and Dirty Tricks

How the cinema destroyed *Alone in the Dark*

WEBSITE aloneinthedarkthemovie.com

I'm sure you all know about this one, the Uwe Boll film that had virtually nothing to do with the original trilogy (or even the fourth game: *New Nightmare*) but everything to do with shockingly bad films.

Christian Slater picked the dullest of the duds here. Remember that bit in *Saw III* where there's a judge being drowned in the liquidised remains of rotten pig carcasses? That's what watching *Alone in the Dark* is like, but worse. Yet amazingly, despite costing \$20 million to make, and the fact it made virtually none of that money back, someone commissioned a second film! With Lance Henriksen in it!

AITD2 is apparently better than the first one too (could that have to do with Boll being nowhere near it?), so that's like, what, the bit in *Saw II* where the man looks through the door and gets his head blown off? Not as bad as being drowned in pig slurry, but still pretty bad.

The sequel has also got even less to do with the original series than the first one. We await *Alone in the Dark 3: Carnby vs the Leprechaun Zombie Nazis* with increased interest.



What you ended up with was a polygonal, free-moving character plunked onto a fixed backdrop. While Edward Carnby looked bizarre (as did his female alter-ego) it was a necessary compromise to make the progressive gameplay possible.

AITD was also one of the first games to introduce the arty-yet-annoying camera angles into gaming folklore. Moving around a room often required numerous double takes as you found yourself crashing into a wooden beam that was previously out of shot. Frustrating when trying to flee.

Survival horror enthusiasts would argue until they were blue in the face that such inconveniences were key to the feeling of suspense in the game, and to an extent they'd be correct. It doesn't mean it's not a huge ball ache when you get taken out because of a shite camera angle, though. Or because the control system is awkward and cumbersome. It's much better, to this writer, than the ones used in *Resident Evil* and such, though, so thanks for small mercies etc.

LITERARY GAME

There's also a huge amount of text to read, if you like that sort of thing. Think of all those books in *Oblivion*, just with references to Shub-Niggurath, R'lyeh and other strange Cthulhu-related phrases. It was also fiendish in its approach, challenging you right from the get-go to think outside the usual "see enemy, kill enemy" routine of most other games. It was and is a classic, one that can be enjoyed as much now as it was back then, even if it's more comedic now to see Eddie Carnby do a strange little dance every time he falls into his pugilistic stance. The sound effects when he doles out a punch or receives damage are comical too.

Oh, and talking about difficulty? This one was a cakewalk in comparison to the second game. Try that and see what I mean, I dare you. **PCZ**



Maybe it didn't notice you.



Both have short life expectancies.

but instead he gets repeatedly killed by ghastly creatures.

So, it's tough. You can read about my first foray back into the game in *Baby Steps*, if you like. For now, let's leave aside the difficulty and focus on other things. Like the visuals.

Obviously they look absolute bottom now, but back in 1992 they were eye-popping. Remember the fact that 3D cards didn't make an appearance until years after this and you might appreciate the scope of what was accomplished with *AITD*.

thrown against a wall reveals a hidden key to the sideboard. A wolf beast then smashes through the window as I'm busy rummaging through the wreckage of the vase – a nice little cutaway to outside the house, showing it leaping through the glass, to provide extra atmosphere to the moment. Quickly, I fumble with the gun and let off a shot. Which, naturally, misses. The wolf chomps me for a bit, but with a mixture of luck and, well, luck, the wolf is gunned down. I'm left without ammo, though, which makes me nervous about my prospects.

Sneaking past a guardian zombie, I make my way through the rest of the rooms on this corridor, exiting onto a marble-floored landing. Egads! Two winged demons are guarding the steps. Mere bullets won't kill

them, I remember that much. I need to think laterally. Remember that book I found in the attic? Maybe that's got a clue in it. Ah, yes, I see how this works now. If I just put this here and then this here... success! The demons are defeated and I can progress further into the heart of the undead-ridden mansion.

What, you expected me to tell you what to do? I've given you enough tips through this, so you're just going to have to solve this one on your own.

But be reassured though: if I can work out the solution, it must be easy.

ALONE IN THE DARK

IBM® VERSION
DISK 1 OF 4



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On the PCZ Hard Drive

The games we're playing, and why we're playing them



LEFT 4 DEAD 2

Die katana: **David Brown**

WHILE ALL THOSE who still haven't got over the "should have been an expansion" thing have sealed themselves off in enthusiasm-proof bunkers, everyone else has been wading through hordes of dead bodies, hacking limbs off with swords



and accidentally blasting their friends with a grenade launcher.

Left 4 Dead 2, despite the protests of a select few, has clearly not been the disastrous cash-in money-gobbling machine that people were accusing it of being. Perhaps the reaction would have been different if the Arch Overlords of Evil (ie Activision) hadn't decided to up the controversy ante with *Modern Warfare 2*, though. Nevertheless, those who didn't 'get' the first game won't be 'getting' this one, and those who did will be the proverbial swine in excrement.

We all know what's good, but let's also try to focus on what Valve haven't done well, which is one of the purposes

of this section. For a start, a big hateful Glasgow Kiss to the people who decided the system for finding servers should have its latency range increased massively. Oh yes please, let us play on a server in Russia! We all love having massive delays and juddering gameplay throughout. And the way it just goes straight to local hosting without even prompting you is also highly amusing and fun.

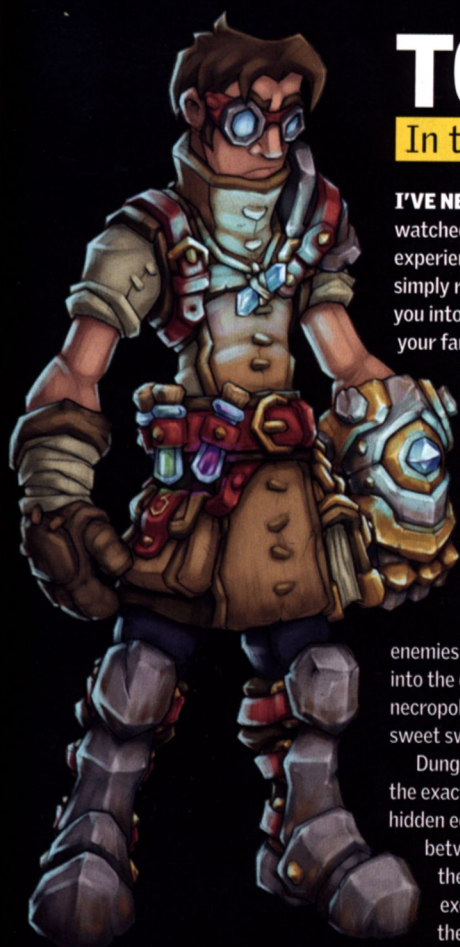
One of the criticisms of *Left 4 Dead* was the fact servers could sometimes be difficult to find. Now it's not difficult to find a server, it's just hard to find one that you can play on without tearing your face off in frustration at the

latency problems. Just give us the option, without using console commands, of manually choosing a server please, then we get the best of both worlds.

Other than that, the game's great, with lots more modes to choose from, the wonderful slash-y sound the sword makes when you hack into Infected flesh and, of course, sitting in a doorway with a chainsaw, sawing zombies to bits for a sustained period of time. It's a fantastic successor, in gameplay terms, to the original, but it's just a pity getting to the gameplay can be such a sodding hassle.

VERDICT: Legged up

"Those who didn't 'get' the first game won't be 'getting' this one"



TORCHLIGHT

In the dark: **Steve Hogarty**

I'VE NEVER PLAYED *Diablo*. I watched somebody playing it once, an experience so boring that the act of simply recounting it to you would send you into a coma so deep that all of your family's tears would soak an entire hospital ward. So I've no frame of reference when talking about *Torchlight*, my opinions of what it is and the thoughts I might convey to you can safely be assumed to be vaguely misleading or at least dangerously inappropriate.

I love *Torchlight*. Click on enemies to kill them, progress deeper into the dungeons and crypts and necropolises and grind XP like so much sweet sweet cocaine.

Dungeon-crawlers live and die on the exact balance of their mystical hidden equations, that relationship between effort and reward, their neurons massaged into excitement with each click, the sound of experience points tinkling into a turgid vat of wasted

time. *Torchlight* nails the mix, perhaps sticking too rigidly to the genre's tenets as I know them – I wish unidentified objects could be equipped, only for their effects, positive or negative, to become known once you've slipped into them. Though that's simply the *NetHack* player in me talking.

You'll get a pet too, who's able to learn spells, which is great. It's like

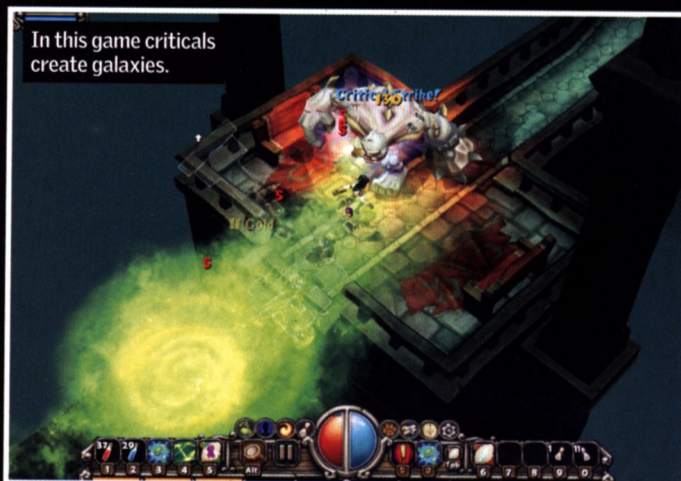
having a budgie who can sit on your teeth and peer down your gob to cure your throat infection. When he's not summoning skeletons, my dog keeps casting aura spells on himself, which sounds a satisfying "bong". Though without having played *Diablo* I can't safely say that the "bong" sounds of its dogs aren't a hundred times better.

VERDICT: Bong



That's a big spook.

In this game criticals create galaxies.



AUDIOSURF

Rocking out: **Richard Cosgrove**

THERE'S A THEORY that McDonald's burgers are so popular around the world because they contain high levels of fats and sugars. These mix in a way that awakens memories deep in our brain of breast milk. So we eat crap burgers because the infant within us finds them gratifying.

I think that's why certain casual games become incredibly popular and

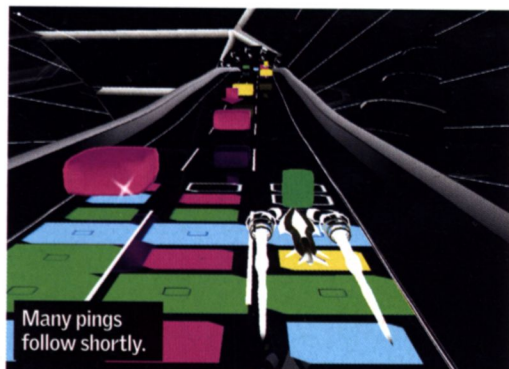
others are never seen from again: lots of flashing lights, cheerful jingly sound effects, and gameplay that requires little use of higher brain functions, creating simple, id-satisfying pleasures.

This definitely applies to *Audiosurf* – collect a block of colour and you get an upbeat beep, twitter or drone, and collect a set of coloured blocks you get a pleasant tune and fireworks. It's a little

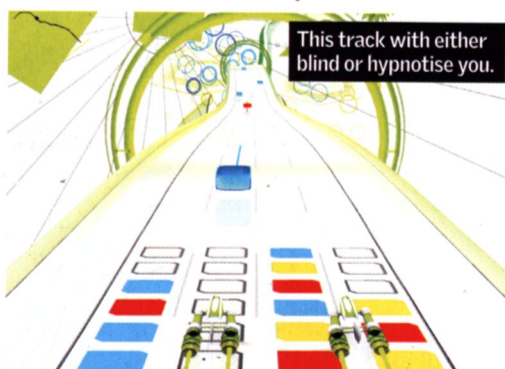
reward that makes you feel good – like a patronising parent giving their rugrat a "Oh, who's a cutie lickie puppie!" when it swallows some mashed organic apple without vomiting it right out.

Unfortunately, *Audiosurf* doesn't reach a PopCap level of simplicity. While a lobotomised Afghan hound could clear *Peggle*, *Audiosurf* requires you to select the type of race to run and a song to race along to before the simplistic game begins. Now if it were to link up with Last.fm or Spotify and randomly pick a race type, it'd be a perfect casual game.

VERDICT: Casual excellence



Many pings follow shortly.



This track with either blind or hypnotise you.

WHAT'S ON YOUR HARD DRIVE?

Readers on their chosen poison

LEFT 4 DEAD 2

While I still hear the call of my *TF2* Sniper, it's all about *L4D2*. Realism mode is the only way to play on campaign.

King *Clueless*

BORDERLANDS

Loaded this at the weekend, and was pleasantly surprised. Can't wait to try as another character when I've finished.

daftvader

DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS

Damn fine game. Shame about the memory leak causing very long loading screens and necessary reboots.

Galoro

VAMPIRE: BLOODLINES

I don't remember the bugs being this bad. Even patched, some of them are game breaking. I'm not above cheating to get around them, but it's tarnished my memories.

G. hughes

LEFT 4 DEAD 2

Will Porter hunts down Chet Faliszek – the man behind the Infected's second coming

CHET FALISZEK BEGAN his life making amusing scribbles on the legendary website Old Man Murray (oldmanmurray.com) with Erik Wolpaw, before being plucked to work at Valve by Gabe Newell himself.

Since then, Chet has provided delicate words to tumble from Alyx's mouth and has been, among other duties, chief

scribe for the *Left 4 Dead* series. He's a charming and gentle sort, thoroughly undeserving of the YouTube hate videos he's popped up in over the past year. (And all because Valve dared to release a sequel to *L4D* that people had to pay for.)

Will Porter shoved a microphone in his face and requested that he talk.



Chet Faliszek
Writer and designer, Valve

As terrifying as a real jockey.



01 JOCKEY LOL

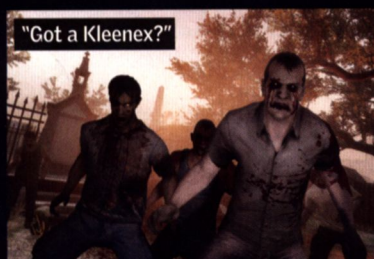
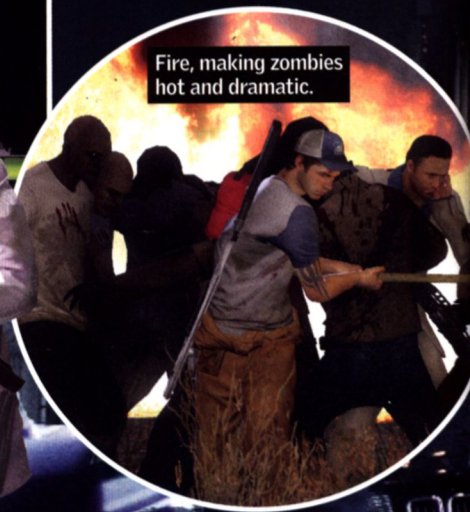
"We're more comfortable with the world we're in now. The Jockey is a creature we came up with right here in this room, going back and forth looking at videos on YouTube of dogs with boxes on their heads running into walls. It's just funny, it makes you laugh every time. The Jockey is the funny creature in there balancing out stuff like the Charger which is the big burly creature and the Spitter that's horrific. We understand our place in not being too campy, because of the weird places you can go, but also not being too hardcore."

02 FRICKIN' LASER BEAMS

"Laser sights were something we had going into *L4D* as well actually. The weird thing is that until you play with them you think 'Ah, they'll probably just help me aim a little better when I'm running' – but the real benefit is when you go to train a red dot on a zombie, only to see someone else's and thinking 'OK, that's already a dead zombie'."

"A really good *L4D* team is one that knows where each other is looking – and I think that's the real benefit. And it looks good – you know it's badass."

Fire, making zombies hot and dramatic.



03 WHY DIDN'T THEY GIVE ZOXY AND CO. A CALL?

"There are some jokes we made about doing cameos with the *L4D* cast, but really we decided there was something bigger that we wanted to do. Going beyond, we thought it would be an interesting pay-off that people would see further down the road. So we held off on that."

Zombie outbreaks wreak havoc with traffic.



04 RUNNING THE GAUNTLETS

"We wanted to try to do Gauntlets in *L4D*, but realised that we had to change the AI Director a lot for it to work. There's a lot of technical things in there about how the creatures spawn and how the Director behaves – a lot of tweaking and re-coding. We wanted to have them in general after watching players cower down – you'd go into games and people would yell at you for not hiding behind a steam pipe. Screw that! The best way to play is the funnest way to play."

"People would yell at you for not hiding behind a steam pipe. Screw that!"



Coach's shirt attracts the most flamboyant zombies.

05 UTILITY BELT ADDITIONS

"We just liked the idea of you having more choices to make and giving you more reason to scavenge around and look for things. Adrenaline was an early one, we wanted it for those moments where you were the last guy standing and you need to heal three people and do it as fast as you can... to let you be a hero rather than run away from your team."

"Then we looked at the other slots that were open – thinking about all the things you'd ever wish you could have. Boomer bile is something we'd talked about a long time ago, a *L4D* idea, but we'd never really wrapped around how it would work or why you'd want to use it. In *L4D* there actually isn't much point in using it, but in *L4D2* there's so much water where the Tank can put his flames out so that alone is a good reason for it."

Chargers: living over-developed wanking arm jokes.

00:27.75

SCORE

7

Enemy Team

13



Sunrise, early in the undead morning.

Oh, those wacky carnival folk.



06 ALL THE FUN OF THE...

"We'd been going with the idea of the fair, and at first what we had in mind was more of a county fair thing – and we were going to have the map end on a train. We had a few problems with that, and it wasn't as fun as we'd hoped. Sometimes you just think something will make you laugh or be cool – and it isn't.

"We kept iterating out of it, and thought how county fairs in the US are normally where washed-up

rock bands end up. We were joking around with that idea for a little while, and kept it on theme. Originally there was going to be this old roadie there you talked to, but what it was about kept changing. At the same time, the fair started getting a little goofier, with the different games you can play and you running the roller-coaster – all of that. So if that was getting odder, we had to get the finale to match it!"

07 HEARING VOICES

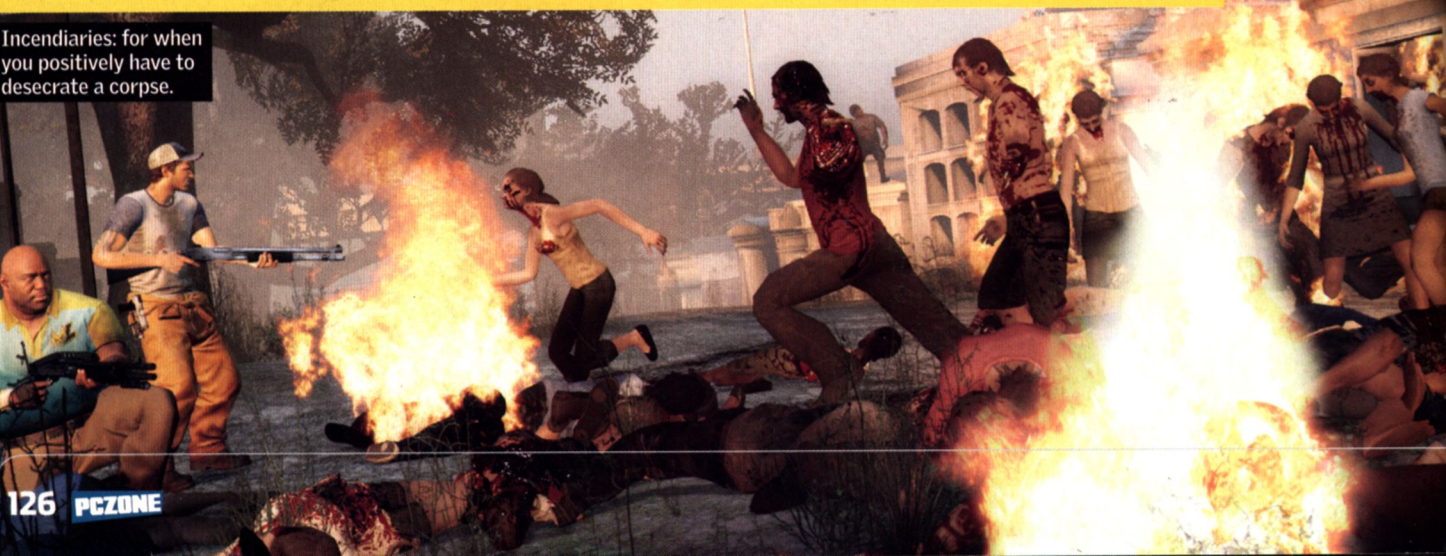
"I think Ellis' friendly-but-smart personality works because Eric Ladin really got it, worked with us on it and really pulled it off. That session was scary: wondering if he'd sound like a crazy hayseed redneck hillbilly or a cool character you'd want to hang around with.

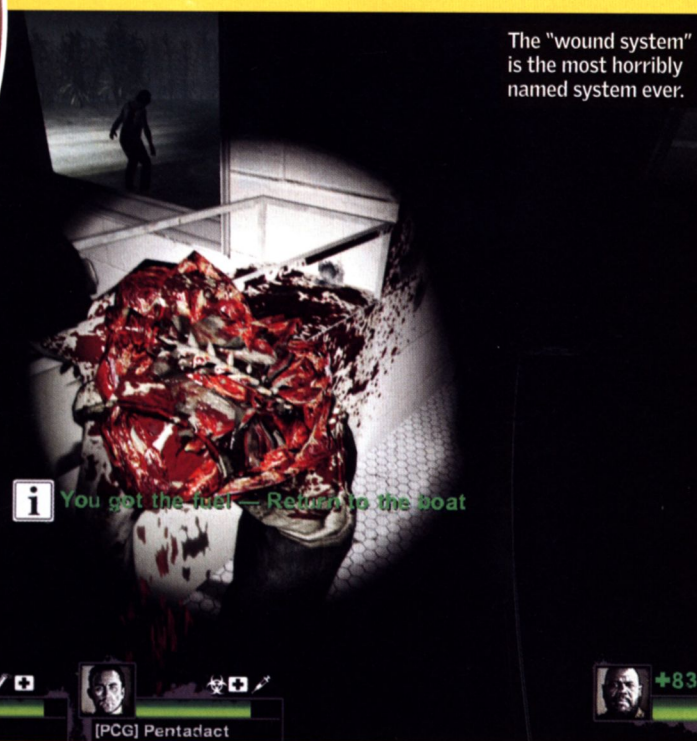
"Eric has been in *Generation: Kill*, and Chad Coleman [Coach] was in *The Wire*. So both were slam dunks once we heard them.

"The guy who plays Nick plays *L4D*, and heard we were casting for *L4D2* – so he'd asked to be in it, and his first reading was hilarious. Finally Rochelle, we liked her so much that we named the character after her!"

If you've read *World War Z*, you'll know that boats aren't safe either.

Incendiaries: for when you positively have to desecrate a corpse.





The "wound system" is the most horribly named system ever.

08 AUSTRALIA-BAITING

"We wanted to play with the gore a bit more, we felt comfortable that we could push on that tangent. One of our guys Gray Horsfield [one of the lead visual effects specialists on the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy] went home to New Zealand for a period, and came back with the wound system done, pretty much. It added so much, chopping an arm off and having them still coming at you – and that was on top of having about 3,000 variations of combinations of common infected.

"Then one of our programmers, Sergey, had been working on the physics stuff – having the bodies flying with pipe bomb mechanics wasn't so demanding that it wouldn't work on low-end machines.

"In *L4D* we had this phrase – 'kill zombies, see cool shit with your friends', that was our pitch. So we wanted to expand on that with the visuals in the world that were either impacting gameplay or rewarding the player; so you'll see the bombs dropping when you're in the French quarter, or the storm coming in the Hard Rain scene that harkens back to the cornfield in *Blood Harvest*."

09 THE NEW BATCH

"The order of development was: Charger, Spitter and Jockey. Along the way there were a couple that didn't make the cut. The Charger came from the fact that, by last December, when playing online in Versus there were teams that were really, really hard to break apart. We wanted something to split them, that people couldn't melee.

"Then we started getting problems with people sitting in corners, camping and not moving out. So at that point in *L4D* we let the Tank take out multiple people at a time. At first he could only do it to one person, while everyone else in the corner could keep on firing at it.

"With *L4D2* we wanted something else to play with that, not just a Tank – the Spitter. The original idea was that they'd be spitting something like in *Episode 2* with the Hunter flechettes – and then they would explode on out. But the goo worked a lot better, it was a lot more versatile.

"Finally the Jockey was in response to people running on ahead or lagging way behind their teams – taking the way they are as a player and exaggerating it to a very bad end. If they're running ahead, and you get them with a Jockey, then you force them to run even further ahead then they want.



10 UNCHOSEN CHARACTERS

"There were hundreds. For character creation for this we had artists go off and start sketching characters and writers coming up with characters they were interested in then we'd have meetings and throw some totally off-table. One side would take somebody else's; so I'd take something that was drawn and write the backstory for it and an artist would take something written and draw from it.

"On top of that it wasn't enough to have the individual character, but you have to make the group and what would make it interesting. Would you want to play that character? Would you be annoyed by that character? There's some really bad stereotypes out there [about the South] that we don't want to play on. If you're from that area you know they don't really exist, and instead we wanted to celebrate all these differences.

"Ellis is a good example – a fun-loving crazy character who's very definitely from the South and is the sort of guy you'd want to hang out with."



STEVE HILL'S

NEVERQUEST

Steve Hill gets apocalyptic in *Fallen Earth*...



I'VE NEVER HAD a piercing. I've never had a tattoo. No interest. If this is what you want; this is what you get. However, given the opportunity to puncture and permanently disfigure my *Fallen Earth* alter ego – aka Neverquest – I go to town, adorning my limbs and face with hideous inky carbuncles, and sticking a hoop through my right earlobe.

I even treat myself to a massive spiky blue Mohican, arguably the ultimate post-apocalyptic accoutrement. It's a lot of effort, and tragically seems to have been in vain when I'm brusquely informed by a distended female voice that I'm already dead, having been mercilessly slaughtered in order for my organs to be farmed.

NEVERDIE

So how am I hearing this information? Something to do with cloning, apparently. Pressingly, this current clone is trapped inside the Hoover Dam, which is about to

blow, forcing me to fight my way through some would-be assailants to freedom. The first task of note involves pulling an axe out of a corpse's head and putting it into a living person's head. I then steal his a gun, and the body count increases exponentially, although I do manage to sneak past some giant Porkupines (sic) without attracting their attention.

More mundanely, I'm required to buy a secondhand PC power supply, a task that I chillingly replicated in real life only days earlier. In reality, it involved waiting outside a repair shop in the snow on the Harrow Road while the proprietor got down on his mat and prayed to Mecca. In *Fallen Earth*, it's a much swifter affair, and I pick up a secondhand one with the minimum of fuss.

With the mainframe back online (or something) my final task is defusing a bomb, which happens to be attached to a quad bike. With little or no aptitude for defusing, I'm left with little choice but to ride the bomb out of there. I have a suspicion that I was never going to make



Not quite The Man With No Name.

"There's talk of a quad bike, which could be something to live for"

it, and as the screen goes white I appear to be dead again. However, some years pass, and someone appears to have re-cloned me, whereby I choose to forge a new life in a two-horse town called Zaneville in the midst of a post-apocalyptic Nevada desert.

Surveying the area, I think to myself that it looks a bit like the Grand Canyon, eventually realising that it probably is, and that I'm a dick. I'm also reminded of an encounter with a tour guide in a Las Vegas hotel. In attempting to dissuade me from visiting one of the greatest natural phenomena on earth in favour of a tawdry show, he barked the presumably well-worn phrase: "Eight hours there, eight hours back.

What you gonna see? Dirt!"

There's a lot of dirt in Zaneville, as well as a poisoned water supply. Compounding the misery, the town is threatened by travellers and survivalists. A murky bunch, they look like the sort of people who would own a dog on a string, drink cider and black, and listen to Ned's Atomic Dustbin.

The so-called Enforcers have no truck with the soap dodgers, and I pick up some casual work murdering them in cold blood, eventually eking together enough

chips to buy myself a horse by the name of Old Nag. Gastro-pubs are thin on the ground in Zaneville, but I get a can of Hillbilly Beer, and make a snack from tainted coyote meat and a bit of relish.

UNFRIENDLY NATIVES

I don't entirely understand the conflict, but I'm essentially a mercenary assassin, trotting round the desert and putting a crossbow bolt into the head of any person or beast I'm paid to. I may have spiky blue hair and a pair of white Adidas trainers, but, to misquote Jon Bon Jovi: I'm a cowboy, on a real horse I ride, I'm wanted, dead or alive. I'm not the only lone horseman, but any attempt at chat or friendship is rebuffed, and I go about my business in a wholly solitary manner.

Old Nag eventually takes ill, and I have to trudge into the desert to buy horse medicine and feed. I'm genuinely pleased to see the Old Nag back on her feet, and go about my murderous tasks with renewed vigour. However, there are only so many Scrounging Prairie Chickens you can shoot before you begin to yearn for a better life.

There's talk of a quad bike in a nearby town, which could be something to live for. But in the meantime it's just me and my horse, riding into the sunset... **PCZ**

He'll go well with chips.

Now that's a first for MMOs.

It's almost pretty. Almost.

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Tiny Compo

Winning Ghostbusters.

215: Laura Heath, Leytonstone

King of Letters

Winning an ASUS 9600GT TOP.

216: Slim the Slayer, Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex

Around The World

Winning a mystery prize!

216: Paul Hartley

PC ZONE Reader Awards

Winning an Alienware M15x gaming laptop.

216: Hany Gohary, Harrow

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and with the water rising at such a rate, who could really blame him? Ed Stern, lead designer on *Brink*, continued to apologise as the freezing tide reached our knees.

"It's our fault, really," he bellowed above the deluge, "for building the Splash Damage studio at the bottom of the ocean." We turned again to peer at the cracked glass ceiling, and beyond it, the mile of saltwater between us and the barely visible, faintly glittering surface. "But if we had read just one more preview intro about boring old Bromley," he continued to scream, "we would've had to kick one another to death."

I laughed, and glanced at my Dictaphone. It had stopped recording. In fact it had stopped working altogether, damaged by a splash. As the water reached our waists, the irony was lost on me.

"I think we'll have to end it there," shouted the hitherto submerged Richard Ham, creative director, rising from the frothing surf, "or else we'll drown." We nodded in agreement and began to half-wade, half-breast-stroke towards a nearby bulkhead, which

was adorned with the words "Teh Bulkhead". To its immediate left, Splash Damage's trophy display cabinet now had four of its five shelves beneath the water. Two IGN awards for *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars* remained submerged, anchored by high-quality glass, a *PC ZONE* award for *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory* bobbed about happily on the surface. A life-size cardboard cut-out of a Strogg floated past.

Ham began to open the bulkhead. With a clunk, the latch was released and the door forced open by the pressure of the flooding room. We spilled out into another corridor.

"Water-way to end an interview," punned Stern as he peeled a starfish from his face.

"That really wet my appetite," added Ham after closing the hatch behind us. He was holding a small sandwich now. Somehow, it was perfectly

dry. "That's the fourth server room we've lost to the inky brine this month," he groaned, gesturing frantically towards the room from which we'd escaped moments ago. "Paul Wedgwood, CEO, insists on building all the walls out of glass and covering the glass in Christmas lights, which attracts fish."

"Who in turn attract sharks," muttered Stern without looking up as he wrung his clothes dry.

"Who are then driven into

a frenzy by our megatexture rendering," sighed Ham. "Electromagnetics or something. They ram into the glass over and over again until they keel over and die."

"They sink," noted Stern. "I thought they'd float up to the surface, but they sink. There's a small pile of sharks around each server room."

I take my seat at a nearby terminal, and we get back to the business at hand. I'm playing *Brink*, the co-op shooter from Splash Damage, who were previously based in Bromley, of all places! They've



Steve,
Intro is a bit
long-winded, reckon
you can cut it down
a bit?
Alu

**"It's our fault, really,
for building the Splash
Damage studio at the
bottom of the ocean"**

Next Month!



ON SALE
17 FEB

WORLD EXCLUSIVE REVIEW!

A L I E N S vs PREDATOR

"The game contains first-person perspective, **close-up** depictions of human characters being **subjected** to various types of **violence**, including **explicit decapitation** and **dismemberment** as well as locational **damage** such as **stabbing** through the chest, mouth, throat, or eyes.

"Characters can be stabbed with a **Predator's wrist blade** or an **Alien's tail** in depictions reminiscent of **impalement**. The Predator collects '**trophies**' by explicitly **ripping off** human heads, their **spinal columns** dangling from **severed necks**. Heads can be **twisted** completely around in order to **break** a character's neck. Eyes can be **stabbed** through or **gouged**, leaving empty, bloodied eye sockets.

"It is noted that a player is able to combine manoeuvres together in **quick succession**, which further **increases impact**; for example, a **Predator** can **stab** a character through **both eyes** with its **wrist blade** and **rip off** their head, with **spinal column** still attached. Extensive **post-mortem damage**, including **decapitation** and **dismemberment**, is also possible."

Classification Operations Board of Australia

BET YOU CAN'T WAIT TO PLAY IT NOW, CAN YOU?

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